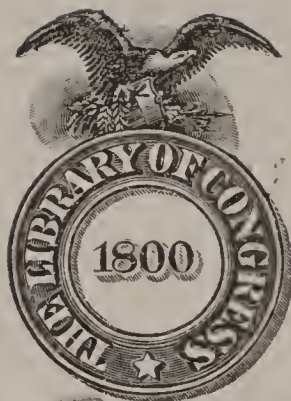


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THE LATE
SIR ROBERT PEEL,
BART.

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A Critical Biography.

BY
GEORGE HENRY FRANCIS.

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THE LATE
SIR ROBERT PEEL, BART.

I.

IS it possible to write an impartial biography of a political contemporary? 'No,' would be the instant answer, if a prevailing impression were accepted without thought.

Yet that impression encourages much injustice to the character of the living, and to the memory of the dead ; while the nation often suffers incalculably in its dearest interests. Obviously, it is of great importance that the people of a country should form a correct estimate of those public men whose ideas and actions more or less regulate their own, affecting closely their mental and material life. Yet, because impartial men shrink from the avowedly hopeless task of doing justice, the reputation of such men falls into the hands of partizans ; by whom the fair proportions of their character are distorted, either in exaggerated good will or morbid malice ; until even their power of serving their fellow-men becomes destroyed or impaired. All their actions are judged by the false standard of political passions or prejudices ; and, although the medium may be ephemeral, the effect is so far permanent, that impressions are stamped on the public

mind, of which the traces remain until at last (but often too late,) history comes to render justice.

Admit that the difficulty is great, and still the stake is worth trying for; partly in love for the truth, partly for the good to be wrought for mankind by spreading sound views of the actions and motives of great men, and so making more easy the task of those who may come after.

With these objects the following 'critical' biography of the late Sir Robert Peel has been attempted. 'Biography' is usually made a mere string of facts and dates, in place of being a history of the mind and character of the man examined. Here, all the actions of the deceased statesman will be judged by the light of contemporaneous circumstances, and his motives read with the commentary he from time to time offered. In this biography, therefore, an effort will be made to look through the actions to the springs of those actions; to test motives; to watch the gradual development of the mind; and to account naturally and logically for many public acts which have been attributed to profound dissimulation, inconsistency, or, more fatal charge, to treachery.

The sudden fate of Sir Robert Peel evoked a world-wide sorrow. Tributes to his memory, not alone from those who were bound to know him, but from those who only contemplated him from afar, spoke the language, not of formal eulogy, but of deep-settled admiration. If grief for his loss, and homage to his talents and services, constitute proofs that his character was appreciated, it may be affirmed that his contemporaries acknowledged in him a great man. There were many among us who best knew his real worth, and have not been slow in testifying to it; they are of the chief

arbiters to whom history will refer. Yet a stronger evidence, however, will be drawn from the brilliant reflexion of his fame in the spontaneous tribute of foreign nations, and still more from the vague instinct of hero-worship, and the more intelligible impulse of gratitude, manifested by the masses in our own country, judging, as they do, from results alone, and uncultivated as they are in the arts of statesmanship, or the tests by which political greatness is determined.

The British people are never slow to do justice to their distinguished men. In life they canvass their character, and often act upon temporary suggestions of party feeling or general prejudice, but in death they never fail to do honour to their talents and justice to their motives. The late Sir Robert Peel stood in a position so peculiar as to mark with more than ordinary significance the alacrity with which a consentaneous judgment has been pronounced in his favour—a judgment characterized by calmness and the superficial evidences of permanency. The more captivating traits of the orator, the patriot, the statesman of the brilliant rather than of the solid order, appeal to the imagination with the more irresistible force when death has removed all detracting or qualifying influences. A halo surrounds such men, which may easily be mistaken for one of permanent glory. To the honour of the English, however, it is seldom that their instincts deceive them in their estimates of the dead. Yet had they done so in the case of the late Sir Robert Peel, they might almost have been forgiven. His was not a career, his were not the qualities, to appeal to the imagination or to lead captive the judgment. He did not fall into his grave followed by the fealty of a party, bound almost in honour to attest his worth, if not to magnify

it. He could not point to a long course of consistent championship, in the political adversity of continued opposition, of principles at last forced on the legislature by a disinterested perseverance. He could not refer to plans of reform and enlightened concession, prepared and urged in early youth, but abandoned in later life in obedience to a national necessity. He could not, like the younger Pitt, unite to the gratitude of a whole nation, saved by his energy and will from foreign invaders, the unwilling admission of his political foes, that but for the overwhelming necessity of a national peril he would have anticipated religious, political, and commercial reform, by nearly half a century. Still less was his reputation embellished by the fascinations of brilliant eloquence or romantic statesmanship. He had never stood forth before the world as the patriot champion of the grievances of oppressed nationalities, nor had he prejudiced the judgment of posterity by aspirations after an impracticable freedom and perfectibility; nor had he, even for an hour, in the whole course of his long career, sacrificed the grave duties of the statesman to the temptations which assail the orator. If ever the judgment of a nation—nay, of a world—was determined by solid realities rather than by specious shows, by deeds and not by professions, by an instinctive conviction of moral worth, and not by a forced assent to self-avowed pretensions, it is the universal verdict that has been given in favour of the late Sir Robert Peel.

Yet, withal, was that eminent man understood? The dull instinct of hero-worship, stirred by the notoriety of a name, the great facts of a long life, and its sad and ignoble end; or a better understood sentiment of gratitude, adopted by the multitude at the suggestion of interested partizans of a par-

ticular policy; or the higher appreciation of higher minds long conversant with the dead statesman's public and private probity, his singular merits as an administrative officer, his unparalleled persuasiveness as a speaker, and his intuitive aptitude as a party tactician; or the quasi-philosophical attempts of journalists and publicists to assume the dignified mien and mission of history, while recording their qualified eulogies, fettered by the remembrance of former virulence or adulation; all these may have contributed individual portions to an enlarged estimate of the character and peculiar claims of the deceased; but is there on record any one comprehensive and expansive analysis? Universal sorrow would attend the death, especially such a death, of one who had occupied a large space in the public eye. Simultaneous meetings of all classes, from the highest to the lowest, to record respect, might be only a national mode of expressing a sense that a void exists by the removal of the most prominent and eminent man of his age. The offer of a coronet from the Crown, and of a public funeral by Parliament; the awarding of a monument in the temple of dead heroes; the contribution of the working-men's pence to a still more honourable record elsewhere; these are all outward signs and symptoms of a nation's sense that it has suffered a great loss. But abstract regret at an appalling calamity, mere vague worship of a name, democratic feeling unconsciously taking the shape of the poor man's gratitude, exaggerated estimates dictated by friendship and increased by the nearness of the object, or professional tributes inspired by the necessity of eulogy, and sharpened in the haste of composition; all might pour, as they have poured, their incense on the grave of the dead, and

yet the world at large might, individually and collectively, possess but a vague and imperfect knowledge of all the claims he had on their respect and veneration, or might still more readily overlook those points in his character which went to overshadow its moral beauty.

There may be, probably there will be, a reaction, at all events an attempt at one. So wide-spread and so unqualified an admiration is almost too much glory for any one man. Public and private virtue have been alike accorded to the deceased in a pre-eminent degree. Such an accumulation of eulogy on one whose lot it was to be reviled and lauded with a striking inconsistency by his countrymen, will be suspected by history, jealous of the fame of her elder political heroes, and fearful that an age which is not emphatically and without dispute 'a great age,' has not in him produced 'a great man.' The truth of an assumption by a publicist,* whose slightest word enters into the elements of public opinion, may fairly be doubted. Posterity, in forming its judgment, cannot ignore striking and singular traits in the public life of Sir Robert Peel. His portrait cannot be painted in one point of view. His character cannot be dashed off with the broad lines and brilliant colours of eulogy, or the luminous purity of his motives contrasted with deep Rembrandt shadows of suspicion or condemnation. He was many-sided, a political philosopher, not so much in distillations of wisdom, or in concrete policy, as in impressibility. Other men were impressible by prejudice, passion, interests; he could only be moved by tangible realities, by facts. To study him, you must study the time in which he

* An eloquent writer in the *Times*.

lived ; which acted upon him, but which was still more reacted upon. A superficial judgment, for or against, will not satisfy posterity ; nor will a pretended impartiality—a mere balancing.

It was the singular fate of the late Sir Robert Peel to have been at war, during the greater part of his life, with all parties and principles in alternation. He exhausted alike the hatred of his friends and the eulogy of his foes. He convicted all his contemporaries of blindness, insincerity, or inconsistency. Himself charged with inconsistency, he still more signally caused the inconsistency of others. There was not a public man, or a public writer, whom he did not compel to think and say of him at one time the absolute reverse of what he had said at another. Tories, Whigs, Radicals, Churchmen, and Dissenters, idolaters of Protection, and fanatics of Free Trade, all were alike wrong in their conception of this many-phased character. Each was in turn wrecked by trusting to only one aspect of this political revolving light. In his earlier life, as a chief, Sir Robert Peel was mistrusted by those whom he led ; in his later career, he led those whom he had never trusted. The early hatred of the latter was indeed compensated for by their tardy but servile admiration ; but the hatred—perhaps the well-founded hatred—of the former, survived his after-greatness, and rejoiced over his political downfall, although, in obedience to the magnanimous instincts of the national character, they offered a tempered tribute of regret at his decease. Remembering these things, and that the vitality of such passions is not easily destroyed, and that political gratitude is short-lived, it may fairly be doubted whether reaction will not show itself ; whether the question of motives and consistency

may not be still a 'vexed' one; whether the unanimity of the tribute that has followed his death is not suspicious; and whether, therefore, it is not desirable to have some more solid basis for the judgment of mankind, than one which may be said to have in a great measure resulted from surprise. Fate and death, in inflicting a cruel blow on the mortal, served the immortal part of the deceased statesman. The sentiment of sorrow has helped to the conviction of greatness, and the two have sunk deep in the world's mind. So far it is well. The late Sir Robert Peel was undoubtedly a great man; but the conditions of his greatness were not those to which the world has been accustomed. They require to be contemplated in their aggregate, and from a distance; in the spirit of philosophical analysis, not under the influence of feeling. Your retrospect must carry you further back than the custom of the hour requires: you must search for motives much deeper than the necessities of position or the ambition of fame.

II.

HISTORY, in drawing the portrait of Sir Robert Peel, will be distracted by the conflicting materials. She will find her boasted impartiality indeed 'a weak-built isthmus' 'twixt two seas, of calumny and eulogy. No ordinary art, no showily superficial estimate, will suffice. She will have to abandon her parallels and her tricks of rhetoric, her ascriptions of motives, and her inferences of the influence of the more vulgar sources of ambition. Walpole, Pulteney, Pitt, Canning, neither will serve her turn. She will have to deal with a man to whom the possession of power, as power, was no temptation; who could not be allured from his

duty, and who would not be rewarded for it by the splendours of a peerage ;—a man who, with a spirit not less romantic, and a patriotism not less intense, than those of Pitt or Canning, disdained to achieve his triumphs by any influences in which the whole people, from the most exalted to the meanest, could not participate. She will have to build up her monument to his fame out of materials humbly and laboriously selected by herself ; for she will find the hasty structures, left alike by the friends and the enemies of the deceased statesman, worse than useless for her purpose.

If she reads the portrait of Sir Robert Peel, as drawn by the consistent upholder of that old order of things which Sir Robert Peel lived to modify, if not to destroy, she will find it sketched by pens tipped with adamant and steeped in gall. Something such as this might be the view of

A 'TORY' PAINTING THE CHARACTER OF PEEL.

Sir Robert Peel was a traitor of a peculiar and almost unfathomable depth. He was born an antagonist of the aristocracy, and entered their ranks only to destroy them. During seventeen years, he practised from year to year, from night to night, an almost fiendish dissimulation, gradually winning the confidence and acquiring the suffrages of those whom he had determined to destroy. Superadding to this grander and more public wickedness, the pettier vice of private and more personal treachery, he conceived and maintained for years a secret enmity towards a statesman of whose brilliant oratorical powers he was jealous, and whose future supremacy in the councils of the nation he feared would be fatal to his own ambition. To destroy this rival, he conspired with six other cabinet ministers,—at their head the most illustrious man the age had produced,—to paralyse the action of the newly-appointed minister, and, by wounding him through his love of fame, to strike his death-blow, not merely in a political, but also in a mortal and physical sense. Having compassed this political and moral crime, he went on to accumulate

infamy by suddenly reaping the harvest which his stricken rival had helped to sow, robbing him, by one act of treachery to party and principle, of fame as well as of life. Discarded by his political associates, anathematized by the Church, and devoted by all upright men to the Nemesis of history, this then unprecedented political traitor commenced, with a diabolical dissimulation, to lay the foundation of a new treason. By seeming self-humiliation, by championship of still remaining institutions and principles, by foremost resistance to the machinery devised by the rival party to secure a permanent hold on the government, he was once more placed at the head of his party, not because they trusted him, for faith was for ever gone, but because his political and parliamentary talents rendered him necessary. Thus, once more accredited, he used his credentials to commit his party to a suicidal acquiescence in the new policy of Reform. Under the guise of an endeavour to render them back under the new system, the influence they, from time immemorial, had held under the old, he was preparing himself, his party, and the country, for another exhibition of treachery still worse than the first. He had entered public life as the avowed champion of the Church and the Land. The former he had sapped, if not destroyed; the turn of the latter was now come. By a consistent game of seeming ardour for protection to agriculture, he got himself returned to parliament, the chief of a landlords' majority of near a hundred. Now was come the time to consummate the long-planned treachery of more than thirty years. The manufacturer's son was now to raise up his order by finally destroying the aristocracy. The traitor carried out his purpose with unblushing effrontery in the face of mankind. As in the first case, he leagued with his political foes for the destruction of his friends; and when the sacrifice was accomplished, and he could glory in thus having put the climax to his public life, he was ignominiously driven from office, pursued in his involuntary retirement by the indignation or contempt of mankind. These would be found amongst his political offences, according to the impassioned asseverations of some of his quondam supporters. But the list is not quite exhausted. There remains a charge of a still baser nature, not touching directly on politics, but yet supposed to be connected with the grand design against the landed interest. About thirty years before his death, Sir Robert Peel professed

to have become convinced that the time had arrived for a restoration of the currency of the country to its old basis prior to the last long war. Under cover of a desire to restore public confidence in the currency, and to re-establish the credit of the country on a basis of integrity, he accomplished a gigantic manœuvre, by which he nearly doubled in value the property which was to descend to him in the ordinary course of inheritance. This he did in defiance of all principles of justice, which required that for the sake of the landed interest the mortgages which had been contracted in a paper currency should be paid in a paper currency also; that a principle, essentially false and prospectively ruinous, should be persevered in, in order to protect the interests of those who had not exercised sufficient foresight to protect themselves; and that, contrary to all accepted maxims of political morality, the permanent interests of the many, and the maintenance of a sound system of currency in a country growing yearly more and more commercial, should be sacrificed to the interests or the improvidence of a class. This crowning baseness of the deceased statesman was the especial abhorrence of one particular school of economists, remarkable for counting in its ranks men of the most opposite political principles; a peculiarity which may mislead the future historian into the belief that, however the foregoing charges may have been attributable to contemporary party feeling, this one, at least, was founded in truth. But the black side of this picture is not yet filled up. An anomaly, the most remarkable of all, will still present itself to the analysis of Sir Robert Peel's career. Pursuing the parliamentary history of more than five-and-thirty years, from very soon after the commencement of this century, he will find indubitable proofs that Sir Robert Peel, even in his youth, but still more in his advanced years, wielded over the House of Commons, and through them over the public, an unparalleled influence. He will find that, in an era brilliant with parliamentary talent, Sir Robert Peel not only kept a position as a debater corresponding with that which he held as a minister, but that, by the concurrent testimony of friends and foes, he was the most accomplished manager of the sympathies of the House of Commons of any hitherto recorded. He will suppose that some such pre-eminence must have been enjoyed by a man who could, even at the earliest accredited age of manhood, impress his contempo-

varies with a sense of his power, and who, towards the close of his public life, became almost a dictator of parliamentary opinion. If, however, as it may be inferred he would, he consulted the parliamentary proceedings for authorities on this subject, he would find from the records of the years 1845 and 1846, that all this opinion of the eloquence and influence of Sir Robert Peel was erroneous, for that the House affirmed, by the most vociferous applause, a series of propositions, deliberately offered, and elaborately worked out, to the effect that Sir Robert Peel was nothing more nor less than an impostor and a charlatan, whose intellectual and oratorical merits were upon a par with his political turpitude.

If the reader thinks the foregoing retrospect of the mad animosity of party is overcharged, let him, ere he judges, refer to the writings and spoken words of journalists and orators, Tory, Whig, and Radical; and for the last part, to the records of the unseemly and almost savage exultation of the House of Commons in witnessing the assaults on their time-honoured idol by Disraeli.

Turn now to other pictures of the same man, painted in colours quite as strong, and perhaps, more durable; and in which the hearty sincerity of the various artists is quite as apparent. Let us yield the essence of his eulogy in later years from ancient enemies, as we have already condensed the censure of his quondam friends. We may thus suppose

A 'LIBERAL' PAINTING THE CHARACTER OF PEEL.

In doing justice to Sir Robert Peel as he at last became, one cannot forget what he had been. It would be to hold up a bad example not to show that such a career as he ran can be the lot of but one man in an era. Sir Robert Peel was not untainted by the errors of the past, however illustrious he has become in the well-earned honours already awarded him by his country. The eldest son and heir of one who, having sprung from the people, had founded a dynasty of manufacturing magnates, Sir Robert Peel was destined, in the strange mutations of modern politics, to be the leader of that landed

aristocracy, to whom his family and the interests connected with them were the natural antagonists, and ultimately to lead a large portion of that aristocracy by conviction to perform an act of justice towards those interests; an act which, however, was at the same time necessary to their own salvation. Influenced in his career by the proud ambition of his father that his son should be the Prime Minister of England, he was scarcely of legal age when he was returned to parliament, having personally distinguished himself at the university, and established his character as a young man of brilliant promise. He had not been a year in parliament when he received from the government of the day the unusual honour of an appointment to the Under-secretaryship of State for the Home Department. In two years afterwards he was made a Privy Councillor, and appointed to the still more responsible office of Chief Secretary of Ireland. At this time he was only twenty-four years of age, and although he had not then established a very high character as an orator, still his official life was the more remarkable from the extraordinary prudence, sagacity, and knowledge of the world displayed by so young a man. But his position was an anomaly. Sprung from the people—himself one of the aristocracy of labour—he ought to have been arrayed on the popular side. The then leaders of the people had more zeal and perseverance than talent or dignity. Had the manufacturer's son—he who had distanced all the young scions of aristocracy on their own self-made ground, by bearing off, against all competitors, the highest university honours,—had he then placed himself in the van of 'progress'—had he been the herald of those great principles of improvement, those recognitions of indefeasable social rights, which he so tardily adopted in his later years—what a magnanimous resolve it would have been, what a glorious career would have been before him! But he was fated to do otherwise. He was to achieve the same glorious results, but by more tortuous means. He was first to serve, then to lead, and then, by seeming to ruin, to save the aristocracy. Twice in his life he opposed himself, in proud humility, to his party. By carrying emancipation, he saved the country from convulsions. He had previously been formally absolved by Mr. Canning from the charge of conspiring to procure his downfall. His next great act was to induce his party to accept the Reform-bill as a *fait accompli*, by which they rendered themselves so popular, that in the year 1840 they were

restored to political power. But a still greater trial awaited the statesman.

Long before he came into office in 1841 he had determined upon leading the ultras of his party into more healthy relations with public opinion. Double-dealing is unhappily a necessary part of statesmanship; and double-dealing Sir Robert Peel undoubtedly practised whilst leader of the Conservative opposition. By the most artful management of his declarations—by dealing in dubious negatives, and parading pompous nothings; by obstructing rather than assaulting, and winning his triumphs rather by letting his enemy overshoot his mark than by overreaching him, he contrived to let his party believe that he was the warm and zealous champion of a reactionary policy, at a time when, if everything he had said was sifted, he would be found to stand unpledged to a single principle or measure. This crooked wisdom is very hateful, but it is not always the individual who must be blamed; party was still strong; it was only by party that Sir Robert Peel could ever hope to rule. Had he not given up a little to party, he would never have been able to develope that which was intended for mankind. At length the turning point came. The Whigs had exhausted popular favour, had wearied and disgusted their friends, whilst they had frightened yet encouraged their enemies. Sir Robert Peel arose and pushed them from their seats. He took the helm. He stood before the country as the responsible inheritor of their former popularity. He knew well that he was not brought in there by his party alone, but that the people looked to him for those substantial benefits which, with the best intentions, the Whigs had been unable to give them. Of course the whole affair had been an enormous political fraud. Of course, it was the Conservative opposition, with Sir Robert Peel at their head, that had paralyzed the Whigs, and hindered them from carrying those measures which he was now about to propose. But such proceedings are too common in politics. The sense of right and wrong is lost in the struggle for power. The only atonement is when that power, once obtained, is used for the public good. In Sir Robert Peel's case, he certainly did make atonement. From the year 1841 he exhibited a wonderful series of developments. His very first act, in coming into power, was to shake off party. The public, the nation, were, from that hour, his party. He became a demagogue, speaking by acts of parliament. One by one he broke the

fetters which bound trade and commerce, and he aimed heavy blows and great discouragements to bigotry and exclusiveness in every shape. Yet there was a plain fundamental solidity in all his plans, that charmed away alarm, and made them as much approved by rational Conservatives as they were by the expectant people. By a long course of able oratory, by an extraordinary analysis and study of the elements of the representative system, he had obtained an absolute mastery over the sympathies of the House of Commons. It was astonishing what a moral elevation he now achieved. He was no longer the plausible chameleon-like politician. He had been a while serving, that he might afterwards rule. He spoke out with a boldness that sometimes almost degenerated into arrogance. He seemed to say, 'I am the State.' Virulently assailed by the more upright members of his own party, he turned round upon them and defied them, saying, 'I will do my duty to the nation; support me or not, as you please. I do not wish to be minister: I will resign if you do not support my measures.'

At many periods in his long political life this manly spirit had flashed out. But it always then seemed as if he wished to check it. Now, however, he rather gloried in it. It produced an impression such as had not been felt in the House of Commons since the days of William Pitt. For some time during his career, more especially after the introduction of the Corn-law Repeal Bill, he was the absolute dictator of the House of Commons. Let us still follow out the imaginary defence. People were taught to believe that Sir Robert Peel was a model of slipperiness and insincerity—that his chief characteristics were sham candour, plausibility, sophistry, and weakness of purpose. In short, he was held up to ridicule, too long, as a kind of political chameleon—one who had no fixed character of his own, but took the hues of his politics from those around him. That man was all along mistaken. His lot was cast in difficult times—fortune at first forced him to breast the current. He worked all along against his own nature, his own sympathies—all which leaned towards confidence in the people. Had he violently changed his side earlier in life, such was the state of public affairs, that he would have utterly wrecked himself as a politician. Those whom he had led to victory through compromise, never heartily loved or trusted him; yet after his last great sacrifice for

public tranquillity, in their family circles, too many of the highest and noblest amongst them never spoke of him by name, but only as 'The Traitor.' The fault was theirs. He could not throw off his hateful cloak of dissimulation till he was strong enough to brave their rage. He then paid off old scores. 'The whirligig of time brought round his revenges.' And not the least claim he had upon the public gratitude was, that both by argument and example he infused his own liberal views into a large and enlightened portion of the aristocracy, who became identified with him in honest convictions. And now to deal with the latest and least defensible attacks on Sir Robert Peel, those which enabled Mr. Disraeli to rise to so high a rank.

Those whose minds are possessed with the old ideas of Sir Robert Peel, will be surprised to find how much dignity there was in his bearing—how much moral courage—what a commanding presence—what a fine intellectual countenance—what a noble carriage. That voice, so full of harmony, which was said only to be used to glaze and to ensnare, they would have found full of deep-toned emphasis, of nervous vigour,—fit organ of bold resolves and magnanimous purposes. They might think the action of the speaker redundant, familiar, even ungraceful, but they would see in it an unguarded, untutored impulse of an earnest resolute man, not the stilted grace and measured pomposity of a trained orator. If they found fault with his speeches—as who would not?—for their extraordinary verbosity, the constant repetitions they abound in, and the absence, except at rare intervals, and on occasions of stirring personal interest, of those brilliant passages which are the pride of the rhetorician; on the other hand, they would not fail to observe that this statesman, of more than forty years' active life, had raised himself to the proud height of being the teacher of the nation—that we should admire, rather than criticise, that laborious sense of duty, which induces a man, who would rather deal with the essence of things, to encumber himself with the flat and weary details of minute affairs. They would not, in justice, forget that a speech of Sir Robert Peel, expounding the principles of any great measure, was, as it were, the spelling-book and grammar of the people on that subject. Sir Robert Peel did more to popularize useful political knowledge than any statesman of the day.

At last, then (we still pursue the line of the later eulogists), Sir Robert Peel righted himself. He entered boldly

on that course from which he was warped in youth by early prepossessions and parental guidance. He was a man for the people. He saved the aristocracy from collision with the other powers of the state, by partly forcing them, partly persuading them, to render a tardy justice. He identified himself with the middle classes and the industrious classes generally. He saw that legislation must be expanded to the compass of their wants. It was not his high honour to give those classes extended political power. But he did more than any living statesman to render that gift a fact, not a mere parchment. Cold, reserved, isolated, haughty in his bearing towards the aristocracy, to the people he spoke as a friend. He took a pride in making acknowledgment that he had sprung from their ranks. He lost no opportunity of exalting them in the social and political scale. He aimed at the extension of their material comforts. The tendency of all his measures, from 1841 to 1846, was to improve their condition. The more Sir Robert Peel is known, the more the false colours in which party-spirit has painted him will become obliterated, the more will he be found to have assimilated with the character of his countrymen. Of him it may with truth be said, that his errors were forced on him by an irresistible fate, but his merits and virtues were all his own. He was essentially English in his character. Charged by superficial observers with coldness, he was a man of the warmest feelings. In his private life he was always a pattern to his contemporaries. In his domestic relations, especially, he was all that the English people love.

Perhaps, in the foregoing summaries, a resemblance may be traced to the views entertained of the deceased statesman by prejudiced antagonists,—it may be, by equally prejudiced friends. If he was such an enigma to those among whom he lived and acted, the task of the historian must, *à fortiori*, be more difficult still. In fact, a solution can only be arrived at by merging the individual in the time in which he lived, and regarding him as an exponent, an administrator of the wants and the will of his countrymen. His greatness, in fact, consists in his having faithfully reflected the age in which he lived.

III.

THE predestinarian might find in the origin of Sir Robert Peel, taken in connexion with his career when in his full growth as a statesman, a confirmation of his theory. The historian and political philosopher might detect therein the action of a retributive justice. The son of a manufacturer, of one who had raised himself, if not from a lowly origin, at least from an humble station, to wealth, power, social influence, and alliance with the high and noble of the empire, Sir Robert Peel lived to accomplish the emancipation of the industrial classes from almost the sole remaining restraint on their energies; while, as the descendant of Saxon ancestors, he was instrumental in abolishing privileges which had long been held up to the people as odious symbols and memorials of the domination established by the Conquest. This is written because such ideas have floated in men's minds, and because foreign publicists have chosen to take this view of the mission of the deceased statesman—to imagine that there lay a great historical myth under this coincidence of origin and destiny. It is, however, just to the memory of Sir Robert Peel to say, that there is not a single fact in his life, as embodied in his public acts and words, to countenance the supposition that he even looked at his duty in so imaginative and visionary a light, or that his fellow-countrymen even regarded him in the character of a reactionary apostle of Saxonism. Nor was he so in fact, except unconsciously, and in so far as by helping to remove restrictions he gave to all the men of the British nation, of whatever origin,

whether they spring from the conquerors or the conquered, a clear stage and no favour.

It has been well explained by Dr. Cooke Taylor, that a once popular belief that the Peel family were of 'low' origin, is a mistake; not that the late Sir Robert Peel was the man to feel ashamed of such an imputation. He rather felt (and so publicly expressed himself on an occasion when Cobbett, in his coarse and levelling way, had addressed him as 'baronet and cotton spinner') that in a free country, it was honourable in a family to have raised themselves by industry to wealth and station. From the West Riding of Yorkshire, some of the Peel (then spelt Peele) family, of Saxon origin, went to Blackburn in Lancashire, where they were small farmers. 'Peel's Fold' is still the name of a small estate in that neighbourhood. The grandfather of the late Sir Robert Peel lived in Fish Lane, in Blackburn, upon the profits of a small farm, and was much given to chemical and mechanical pursuits. The history of the family is that of the progress of cotton-spinning by machinery; but the details, though interesting, are no necessary part of the present work. It is an interesting evidence, however, of the enormous energy that must have been employed by the family in building up, within so brief a space of time, a colossal fortune, that this very grandfather of whom we speak, acquired the name of 'Parsley Peel,' from the first pattern he used in attempting calico printing having been a parsley leaf. This, the first experiment of the kind, was made in secrecy, and in his own house; the cloth, instead of being calendered, was ironed by one of the family, and the pattern was a parsley leaf, scratched on a pewter platter. Another story differs from this, the family tradition,

only in so far as that this germ of a great social revolution was formed at the house in Fish-lane, in Blackburn, and that the cloth was calendered by an old woman, a cottager hard by, named Mitton. These facts are now 'familiar in our mouths as household words;' but they have their historic value when contrasted with the distinguished career of the grandson of this humble experimentalist, and with the enormous fruits into which that germ developed.

The proud boast made on behalf of the emperor Napoleon, that he threw open the road of life to ability, might with much more truth be referred to men like the father and grandfather of Sir Robert Peel, who worked out the same mission by an influence more potent than even the fiat of rulers—the force of example. Men of that class even then clearly understood their position, and foresaw their destiny; nor was it a blind instinct of ambition, or of paternal pride, that prompted the first Sir Robert Peel to the well-known belief that he should become the founder of a family, and that his eldest and favourite son would one day be Prime Minister of England. To know the full value of such a prophetic conviction, we must compare the difficulty and improbability of the task with the means taken to accomplish it. From his father it must have been that the deceased statesman inherited that intensely practical temperament which was the main cause of his future eminence; so that the same class of faculties which built up the new order in the state, was also engaged in training the youth of the man who was in after life so to change the laws as to adapt them to the growing claims of the power thus created. The first Sir Robert Peel started in life with the con-

viction that there is no position in the country too high to be attained by capacity, industry, and prudence. His distinguished son, after having exemplified in his own person the soundness of this opinion, re-produced it with the stamp of his authority, in his celebrated address to the students of Glasgow University, when he said to them, 'Even if what is called genius shall have been denied to you, you have faculties of the mind, which may be so improved by constant exercise and vigilance, that they shall supply the place of genius, and open to you brighter prospects of ultimate success than genius, unaided by the same discipline, can hope to attain.' Exactly on this principle did this clear-headed and practical father train his child. His more tender years were passed at home (he was born in a little cottage near Chamber Hall, in the neighbourhood of Bury, the seat of his father's business, the family house being under repair at the time), where his father himself superintended the formation of his character, and gave the early bent to his mind by precept and example. Of his school-life we have but one glimpse—that contained in the passage from Byron's diary—but it is enough to show that on good capacity, perseverance, and industry, rather than on any extraordinary natural gifts, he relied for the success which, as a natural consequence, he attained. In the same course he held his way at Oxford, where he came out triumphant with double first class honours. All that the best training could do for a youth was done for him; so that when at last the time came for his entrance into public life, he stepped forth well armed and accoutred; and paternal love was the enchanter who thus had equipped him.

Some have exclaimed, ‘ Ah ! it is easy to mount to eminence, when the path is smoothed for you in youth. There was the young Mr. Peel, after having received the training of the first educational establishments in the world, suddenly provided with a seat in parliament, and ushered into the world with all the advantages of social position and fortune ! The wonder would have been if he had *not* succeeded under such auspicious circumstances.’

This is so far true, that the young Mr. Peel was (in 1809) returned to the House of Commons as member for the borough of Cashel in Tipperary, almost as soon as he had attained legal age, and that all this was done for him by his father, and not by himself. But how many other young men had been in like manner aided at the outset of their career, starting with even greater advantages of birth, fortune, education, and natural powers, not one of whom attained distinction ! When, too, Mr. Peel began his parliamentary career, it was with no ordinary rivals. Brougham, Palmerston, Lord Lansdowne, and the present Earl of Ripon (each of whom gave promise of eminence), Canning, Romilly, Grattan, Mackintosh, and Francis Horner, were among those with whom he was to compete. Nor was this all. The great orators of the age had scarcely passed from the scene ; and the House of Commons had become used to an order of eloquence which only genius could reach. These were no ordinary obstacles to the rise of the young aspirant ; but he met them with characteristic prudence, and what may almost be termed a calculated modesty. A man who had carried off the highest honours of his university could not have been chargeable with presumption had he at once essayed to make a reputation as a speaker ;

but Mr. Peel preferred, with his constitutional good sense, to study his audience. Although he occasionally spoke, it was only on questions of a practical nature which he happened to understand ; nor did he venture on a 'set speech,' till after he had been about a year a member of the House, when Mr. Perceval, then Prime Minister, called on him to second the Address. His speech was a decided 'success.' It displayed just enough of the graces of oratory to adorn its sound practical conclusions. Its chief feature, besides a well-timed and manly tribute to the Duke of Wellington, then fighting in Spain, was in the following passage :—' England,' he said, 'desired neither peace nor war, but she would suffer no indignity, and would make no unbecoming concessions. With every engine of perfidy and power against us, the situation of this country had proved to Buonaparte that it was invulnerable in the very point to which all his efforts were directed. The accounts of the exports of British manufactures would be found to exceed by several millions those of any former period. With regard to our internal condition, while France had been stripped of the flower of her youth, England had continued flourishing, and the only alteration had been the substitution of machinery for manual labour.'

Within a very short time of the delivery of this speech, Mr. Perceval offered to Mr. Peel the post of Under-Secretary for the Home Department—an auspicious commencement of public life for a young man of twenty-two.

Thus cursorily, and to the exclusion of much interesting domestic and personal detail, has the first portion of Sir Robert Peel's life been touched, because this little work professes to aim at analysis

of character, rather than at the reproduction of facts which are so familiar. He is now established as one of the marked men who are appointed to run a career, alike for their own fame and the good of their country. Of his antecedents all that was known did not place him in a more favourable position than that which had been held by Mr. Robinson (Lord Ripon), Lord Henry Petty (Lord Lansdowne), and others who had been helped over the early obstructions of life ; nor, indeed, was it till many years had passed that Mr. Peel gave promise of his ultimate eminence, or of his bearing within himself powers that would one day stamp his character with such strong individuality.

For many years Mr. Peel continued identified with the Tory party, as it was in those days. His father, who had received the baronetcy from Mr. Pitt, was a Tory of the old school, with whom his political opinions were a faith. Known as a friend, and even as an adviser on commercial subjects, of Pitt, the first Sir Robert Peel reflected in his son the strongly-pronounced character of his views ; and as the discipline of party then even more than now it does demanded acquiescence from its neophytes and pupils, whatever was latent in the mind of the young man lay silent in the shadow of his adopted creed. It is not surprising, therefore, that as he advanced in reputation, and excelled his former self in debate, his principles should have been taken for granted, until the conscript fathers of Toryism looked on him as one of their most promising pupils, and as the future champion of their political faith. There can be no doubt that, to the delight of his father, he was thus regarded by the Eldons and Percevals, who then ruled the will, if not the thoughts of men. If, in his own

heart, the young politician could not quite adopt the tyrannical and aggressive character of their creed, it is natural to suppose that, with an Oxford education, with the example and precept of such a father, and above all, with the association and patronage of the Tory officials around him, he had acquired as much confidence in the system he was destined for so many years to uphold, as was consistent with a disposition naturally observant, inquiring, and thoughtful. At all events, it is not necessary to presume habitual dissimulation.

As Under-Secretary for the Home Department, Mr. Peel continued a comparatively silent member of the House of Commons, but carefully studying the business of official life, during about two years; when the assassination of his immediate patron, Mr. Perceval, caused a change in his position.

IV.

THE interval between the year 1812 (in August of which he was a privy councillor) and the year 1818, presents us with one—almost the earliest—phase in the official life of Sir Robert Peel. During that period he filled the important post (to which he was appointed in September, 1812) of Chief Secretary for Ireland; one of difficulty and delicacy even at the present day, when so many causes of intestine antagonism and strife in that country have been removed; but at that time one of the most arduous, dangerous, disagreeable, to a man of high honour and sensitive mind, in the whole range of ministerial offices.

Well might the deceased statesman, when in later life he attained to the supreme power, exclaim

that 'Ireland was his greatest difficulty.' Six of the earliest years of his manhood, the spring-time of that season of youth when man is most impressionable, and when moral disgusts leave their most enduring traces in the memory, were spent either in Ireland, or in the direct control of Irish affairs. At four-and-twenty years of age, to become the mark for all the envenomed shafts of unscrupulous partizanship and systematized slander; to see his purest motives vilified and distorted by adverse factions, and his noblest acts, his wisest measures, neutralized by a perverse national temperament; this was a severe trial to the character of a young statesman, whose life had been sworn to the service of his country, and whose aspirations tended to the good of mankind. But harder still to suffer than the virulent abuse of foes, was the mistaken zeal of friends. Willing to administer the affairs of Ireland with a high and even-handed justice, the exclusion still maintained against the Catholics compelled him to govern mainly by the agency of their political and religious opponents. With these, antagonism to the papists amounted to a passionate frenzy, and every step taken by the young Secretary in order to assert the majesty of the law and the dignity of the government, was hailed by zealots as a new manifestation of his devotedness to the cause of intolerance and ascendancy. This feeling of course reacted upon the Catholics, whose leaders and chief newspaper writers were accustomed to brand Mr. Peel with the most disgraceful epithets furnished by the armoury of vituperation, or suggested by the precedents of history against tyrannical administrators.

Yet the young Secretary as little participated in the bigotry of the one class as he deserved the

animosity of the other. Through the ensanguined medium of religious passions, neither saw him as he truly was,—an officer of the government, charged with a mission of awful responsibility, who desired to make himself master of the wants of Ireland, to study the character of the people, and in the meanwhile to put down crime and secure life and property. On the one hand, he had to contend against miscreants like those who afterwards bore the name of Whitefeet,—demons in human form, with whom to murder, when commanded so to do, was a high moral duty ; and—task still more hard !—with their lay and clerical apologists : men so blinded and frenzied by the sense of wrong, that they forgot the first principles of the religion they professed ; or with the watchful partizans of the rival creed, exulting in such evidences of iniquity, and seizing on them to brand the peaceful and loyal Catholics with the odium only due to the extravagances and the sins of a few violent fanatics.

It was partly to meet the difficulties created by this state of things, that the youthful Secretary introduced, in June 1814, his measure for ensuring the better administration of the laws in Ireland ; a measure founded on a careful examination of the real causes which secured impunity for agrarian crime. In an able and temperate, and impressive because temperate, address, Mr. Peel proposed that measure to the House of Commons, detailing such a system of organized atrocity, as even at this day curdles the blood. Unhappily, within the last few years, this hideous evil has once more developed itself in Ireland ; and although it is not so widespread as formerly, the disease is still so virulent in its exhibition, as to require remedies not very far removed from those prescribed by Mr. Peel

nearly forty years ago. Then, however, the mischief was so universal and so threatening, that the government were forced to substitute for the proposed measure of legislation a general insurrection act.

It is gratifying to find that even at this early period of his public life, and under circumstances of such strong provocation to a man who had received his training at Oxford, the tone of his speeches breathed moderation, and an anxious desire to attain to truth in knowledge and justice in government. He was contemptuously called 'Orange' Peel; yet no better foundation for the charge could be found than that he was the chief secretary of a Tory government, and the rising hope of the Tory party. We search in vain for proofs of his 'Orangeism'—at least, of its bigotry and intolerance, in either his acts or his speeches. Unfortunately, the public are too ready to listen to calumniators, too slow to sift the facts. The young Secretary was not a partizan of Orangeism, but he had to administer the government at a period when what was termed 'Protestant ascendancy' was almost tantamount to the law of the land, and when there existed no other machinery for carrying on the government than that provided by the professors of the opinions embodied in that term. Even in England, although some of the most enlightened men of the age were favourable to the emancipation of the Catholics, 'public opinion'—that mysterious, intangible, but omnipotent agent in national affairs—was still sternly opposed to any such measure. Whatever might have been, we will not say the opinions, but the tendencies of Mr. Peel in reference to the general question of religious liberty, to have abandoned the

formularized system of ruling, would have been to paralyse the right arm of his authority. He would have estranged friends without propitiating enemies. Even since emancipation has been the law, and perfect equality the theory of government in Ireland, recent lords lieutenant and secretaries of state have been compelled to resort to a system not dissimilar. To govern Ireland by 'undertakers,' was an ancient device: the same thing, disguised in various forms, has become a modern necessity. The balance, it is true, has of late years been less violently swayed by the one party or the other; but there has always been a sensible preponderance according to the political colour of the English government. To-day, the Church and the Tories; to-morrow, the Pope and the Liberals. There is always so much real work to be done in Ireland; the elements of discord are so fearfully ready to rebel against the law of order; that a local ruler is almost bound to avail himself, as a social necessity, of every means of control and repression that can be pressed into the service of the imperial authority.

But while at that day Mr. Peel had no alternative but to govern mainly through the agency of those with whose opinions his own coincided, it is important to note that he never 'gave up to party what was meant for mankind.' He must be judged by his own acts and words, not by the interpretations of enemies smarting under wrongs, and who were only blameable in so far as they personified in him the oppression of an age or the hostile principles of a century. Attempting as we here do, to anticipate the duty of the historian, it is of the last importance, in judging the character of Sir Robert Peel, to know how far his earlier opinions bore out the charge of later inconsistency; because,

if it could be ascertained that his mind was always in a state of development, and that his inquiring faculties were ever at work, then, his later career would give him an additional claim on the respect of his countrymen. With the private opinions of public men the public have no concern; but only with their public acts and declarations, which, for the world at large, constitute their life.

We find in the speeches and ministerial acts of Mr. Peel at this period, a deep-seated desire to enforce the law, and arrest the progress of crime; but no alacrity to put in action extraordinary powers granted by the legislature. By a judicious balancing of the demands of the magistracy for troops with the opinion of the military commander as to their necessity, the natural craving of Irish Tory magistrates for coercive measures was practically neutralized; while, on the other hand, no vigilance was spared in putting down the atrocious system of agrarian crime. To the wise foresight and persevering energy of Mr. Peel, Ireland is mainly indebted for that most valuable force the constabulary. One of the greatest evils with which successive administrations in Ireland have had to contend, has been the reckless violence, and unbridled licentiousness of the press. One passage, from some observations of Mr. Peel in a speech in April, 1816, on the general condition of Ireland, so forcibly describes the actual conduct of the press in Ireland at that time, that we cannot do better than reproduce it. He said:—"Among the causes which have unquestionably contributed to produce the present disturbances and outrages in Ireland, may be reckoned the public press of that country. I am far from meaning to say, that the benefits which result from a free press do not greatly, if not

wholly, overbalance the evils of its abuse. I would even assert, that what might be called the extreme licentiousness of the press, in a former period of our history, mainly assisted in securing to us invaluable privileges. But what can be said in favour of a press which never seeks to enlighten the public mind—which never aims at the dissemination of truth—which never endeavours to correct the morals, or improve the happiness of the people? On the contrary, the most studious efforts are made by it to keep alive and foment discord, and the malignant influence of the worst passions of our nature. Their only object is, to make it be believed that the very sources of justice are corrupted; that the verdicts of juries are always venal; and the conduct of magistrates always base. By such insinuations, industriously and perseveringly spread, many persons are driven into the commission of some paltry offence, when, in my opinion, they are infinitely less guilty, in a moral point of view, than those vile and degraded beings by whom they are instigated. The most infamous falsehoods and calumnies are uttered against magistrates, thus pointing them out to the vengeance of those misguided men whose passions are easily worked on. The consequence of such general and indiscriminate abuse as defiles the public press in Ireland, involving every person whose station, rank, or conduct renders them the least public, is, that no one dreads censure; and that, therefore, the source of public opinion—that great auxiliary to a free press—is utterly destroyed. The House can form no idea of the licentiousness of the press to which I allude, by reflecting on what is called licentiousness in this country.'

It will be imagined how difficult a task was the

government of Ireland in the face of a press so maleficent, and a social system so distracted, that aid from partisans was the thing the most to be dreaded by a government, because the sure signal for an exasperation of strife.

Mr. Peel did not allow himself to be daunted by these difficulties. During his administration, he steadily explored the sources of Irish evils, and more than a quarter of a century after, he attempted as Minister to profit by his early experience. Although he was denounced in the press, and even in Parliament, as a bigoted Orangeman, the utmost he ever said on behalf of the Orange Lodges was to defend them from false charges.

At the same time, during his administration, and for many years afterwards, he let pass no occasion of appealing to his co-religionists to abstain from offensive demonstrations insulting to the Catholics. He always preached moderation and self-restraint. On one occasion, in 1823, when taunted by Mr. Abercrombie, he emphatically said, that were he a gentleman of Ireland, he would use all the influence of his station to induce the Orangemen to desist from any of those practices which are considered so objectionable by their Catholic countrymen. Two years later, he declared, in his place in Parliament, that any person proved to belong to an Orange lodge would be dismissed from the public service—a declaration which gave immense satisfaction to the Irish Catholics of those days, and helped their leaders in putting down the secret societies of the peasantry. His declaration was speedily followed by a promise that the Orange Societies should be abandoned—a promise which was not kept. While distracted by the wretched political and religious conflicts of the

rival factions, the young statesman was carefully studying the social condition of the Irish, and the means of furthering their productive energies. From the first years of his local administration to the last hours of his general superintendence as Home Secretary, we find him constantly impressing on the Imperial Parliament the importance of social rather than political remedies—the necessity for fostering the butter trade, and the other producing interests of the south; and above all, of encouraging the linen manufacture of the north. The selfish and cowardly practice of too many landlords, leaving their starving tenantry to the mercy of agents and middle-men, on whom was put the rack-rent screw to furnish the means for extravagance in London or abroad, found in Mr. Peel an eloquent censor. He pointed out, not merely the material exhaustion, but also the moral and social deprivation resulting from this abandonment of the first duty of the owner of the soil. He also showed that another evil resulted from this practice, in the want of a resident magistracy, so that the government were compelled to appoint inferior and often unfit persons. Mr. Peel had early formed an estimate of the Irish character higher than that of average observers. He accounts for conflicting opinions on the subject, by the different aspect of the people in different counties. Speaking of his own personal experience of the people of some counties, he said it was impossible to find anywhere men more tractable, more obedient to the laws, or more disposed to pay all deference to their superiors. He believed that they possessed great fidelity, in their dealings with each other great honesty, and that from their early marriages they were in general

very chaste. Here we have a few points, establishing that in his public and official character, Mr. Peel, as Irish Secretary, was very far indeed from being the bigoted partisan. Yet in this light he is even now too often represented by persons who sacrifice historical truth to their desire to establish a striking contrast between his earlier and later career as a ruler of Ireland. For the *general* policy of the administration of Lord Liverpool he was not responsible, being at that time only a pupil of party, and a subordinate in the government. A subject on which he spoke at various times with unusual warmth was that of the education of the people of Ireland. Bearing testimony to the avidity of the lower orders for education, whether for themselves, as adults, or for their children, and to the sacrifices they made to procure it, he very early laid it down as a principle, 'that it was better to have a well-instructed and an enlightened Catholic population than an ignorant and bigoted one.'

This principle, frequently enunciated by Mr. Peel while Secretary for Ireland, in 1813, in 1815, and in 1816, afterwards became the basis of the 'National' system of education in that country. He advocated the same general principle again in 1822; in 1824, he specifically recommended the Protestant and Catholic children should be united under one system of education, and that proselytism should, as a point of honour, be abjured on both sides. In 1826, he supported the present Lord Monteagle's motion on the subject of Education in Ireland; with the view of enforcing that proposition, citing in its favour the late Archbishop Murray's plan, that the children of the two creeds should receive a secular education in common, but their religious instruction apart; and that there

should be in the schools, to be used in common, such selections from the Scriptures as could be used by the children, 'without trenching on those doctrines upon which the two sects differ.' And when at length the plan thus recommended was embodied in a measure, under the control of Mr. Secretary Stanley (the present Earl of Derby), it met with the cordial support of Sir Robert Peel. As an additional, if a minor, proof of the enlightened moderation of Mr. Peel, while Secretary for Ireland under a 'Protestant ascendancy' administration, it may be added, that in referring to the professors of the antagonistic creed, he always avoided the (to them) offensive theological taunt implied in the term 'Roman,' and studiously spoke of them as 'Catholics.' Whatever his own views, he thus early felt that he must treat them as a statesman, not as a religious partisan. In 1817, Mr. Peel was returned to parliament as representative of Oxford University; and in 1818 he resigned his post of Chief Secretary for Ireland.

One incident during this period of Sir Robert Peel's life demands notice, in so far as it exemplifies his sensitiveness on the score of his personal honour, although so little moved by the passions of the hour. From the really great Irish patriot of the day, the illustrious Grattan, Mr. Peel received a dignified and sincere homage to the lofty moderation and excellent good temper which had characterized his Irish administration; but from O'Connell he met with abuse of the most coarse and vulgar kind. It was from him that he received the sobriquet of 'Orange Peel;' and in various speeches he denounced the young Secretary as the cold-blooded instrument of tyranny. It

was rarely that O'Connell did not redeem the vulgarity necessary to amuse an Irish mob with some touch of humour, some dash of vigorous character-painting ; and in one of his tirades he certainly did hit off Mr. Peel's logical plausibility when he described him as 'a lad ready to vindicate anything—everything !' Mr. Peel took no notice of O'Connell's virulent attacks until the debate (in 1814) on Sir Henry Parnell's motion in favour of the Catholic claims, when he quoted some of the worst passages from various speeches of O'Connell, in order to show the danger of concessions which might be made a lever by such a man. Mr. O'Connell so far forgot himself as to say, at a public meeting shortly after, that Mr. Peel would not dare in his presence, or in any place where he was liable to personal account, to use a single expression derogatory to his interest or his honour. Mr. Peel sent a friend to O'Connell to say that he held himself responsible for whatever he might have said in Parliament ; but it could not be settled which of the two should give the challenge. Subsequently O'Connell denounced Mr. Peel's conduct as a trick, when the latter sent him a challenge. The duel was prevented by the arrest of Mr. O'Connell.

V.

IN the interval between his resignation of the Chief Secretaryship for Ireland, and his appointment to that of Secretary of State for the Home Department, Mr. Peel remained an 'independent' member of Parliament, but giving his general support to the government. It was at this period of his life that

he became identified with the great measure of Currency Reform.

In the alarming exigencies arising out of the French war, Mr. Pitt had authorized the Bank of England to suspend cash payments during the pleasure of Parliament. In the first flush of loyalty, and of a prosperity sustained by the concentration of our national energies, the effects of the enormous increase of paper money (not only of the Bank of England, but of private banks, and even of individuals,) did not manifest themselves in an evil shape. But in the course of years, the excessive issues of notes led to their depreciation in value. Guineas were at a premium. The timid or the wise bought them and laid them by, because not only were they increasing in comparative value, but the decline of public confidence seemed to point to a time when they might become the only available medium. Mr. Pitt's measure was sternly protested against by Fox and the opposition of the day (1797). In 1805, Jenkinson (the first Earl of Liverpool) addressed a 'letter to the king' on the gold coin of the realm and the condition thereof, in which he protested against the excessive issues of paper money, and called for a parliamentary inquiry. In 1806, the present Marquis of Lansdowne (then Lord Henry Petty) chose the same theme in its application to Ireland for his maiden speech, which, by indicating the direction of his studies, led to his being named Chancellor of the Exchequer in the ministry of 'All the Talents.' Ricardo first earned his fame by publishing a remarkable pamphlet on the high price of bullion and the depreciation of paper; and at length, thirteen years after the original measure of Mr. Pitt, Mr. Francis Horner obtained the assent of the House of Commons to

the appointment of a committee on the subject, of which he was chairman. After long examination and violent controversy, Mr. Horner stood forth in the House of Commons on the 8th of May, 1811, to propose certain resolutions adopted by the committee, the effect of which was to order the convertibility on demand of all paper currency, the limitation of the Bank Restriction Act to two years, and an intimation to the Bank of England directors that, in regulating their issues of paper, they should look to the state of the foreign exchanges, and to the price of bullion.

Vansittart was now the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He opposed Mr. Horner's resolutions. He asserted that bank notes were *for the internal purposes of the country*, to which they were restricted, still equivalent to legal coin; and he called on the House to 'pledge itself to that belief.' In the face of the fact that a guinea, even if worn to the bone, would sell for at least twenty-two shillings, this was a difficult article of faith, and all the artillery of government votes was required to enforce it against the common sense of the day. Mr. Canning exercised his wit on the tempting proposition; and Curran said that 'Wellington had eaten his Christmas pies at Torres Vedras,' and that every hundred pounds of gold that was sent him there, cost in London one hundred and forty pounds.

Still the government prevailed. The late Sir Robert Peel gave his vote in support of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's resolutions, and against those of Mr. Horner. He was probably influenced at the time mainly by the opinions of his father, who belonged to a school of financiers of which there are many disciples in many countries. He believed that paper money was the best circulating

medium for internal purposes; and he had this excuse for his belief, that it is very questionable whether the manufacturing system of this country would have attained its sudden development, if money had not been so abundant. He was, too, a passionate admirer of William Pitt, and associated paper money with the triumphant resistance of this country to Buonaparte. Of his father, the late Sir Robert Peel said, 'that he moved in a confined sphere; that having lived under his roof till the age of manhood, he had had many opportunities of discovering that he possessed a mechanical genius and a good heart.' Still, on a subject like the currency, he might well defer to the opinions of one whom in all respects he honoured; and there was this additional reason for his support of the government, that however sound might be the principles laid down by Mr. Horner's committee, their realization must clearly be a work of time. It was the great characteristic of Sir Robert Peel, that with him principles were always leavened by expediency; that he distinguished between what was abstractedly right and what was practicable, so that his legislative actions always lagged behind his intimate convictions.

A strange fatality has always pursued Sir Robert Peel. He has ever seemed the most prominent opponent of the changes afterwards associated with his name. As with Catholic emancipation and the corn laws, so with the currency. Personally, it is true, he was not so ardent a supporter of the paper money system as his father; but the prominence of the one lent an implied sincerity to the assent of the other. There was no little astonishment, therefore, when Mr. Peel, in 1819, became chairman of the committee appointed in February of

that year (a committee of secrecy) to inquire into the state of the Bank of England with respect to the resumption of cash payments. The proceedings of this time in parliament afford a singular commentary on the action of 'party' in this country. In 1797, Charles James Fox, as leader of the opposition, had denounced Pitt's Bank Restriction Act as a measure little short of spoliation. 'It had struck at the foundation of the public credit of the country, by seizing the money belonging to individuals, deposited in the public treasury of the public creditor, and afterwards withholding and refusing payment of that money.' Two-and-twenty years had passed away, and still there was a Tory government in power; but that government had been compelled, by the monetary and commercial difficulties of the time, to adopt conclusions the reverse of those held by Pitt, and closely resembling those embodied in the denunciation of Fox. Yet, in the discharge of a constitutional duty, the opposition, still Whig, felt compelled to resist the government. The 'committee of secrecy' was to be appointed by ballot, and each member could put a list of twenty-one names in a box on the table of the House. As, however, the government had circulated a specific list, which it was supposed their supporters would use, the opposition declined to take any share in the matter, *either as voters or scrutineers*. Mr. Lambton (an honoured name among the Whigs) was proposed as a scrutineer; but he flatly refused, on the plea that as it was well-known who were to constitute the committee, 'he would decline picking up their names.' Of course Mr. Lambton and his friends were right in objecting to an unfair proceeding; but as it was notorious that the objects of the government were identical with

those of Mr. Horner and of their own deceased leader, it is remarkable that they should have chosen that time for their sturdy abstinence. Mr. Peel showed himself more practical and less impracticable. His adhesion to the government views would inevitably involve a change of opinions; but *he* did not shrink from his public duty, however repugnant to his private views. It is right to dwell upon this early instance of his new reading of the duty of a statesman, because it throws a light on all his subsequent conduct at great political crises, and helps to explain why he distanced his rivals, and, to use the phrase of Sir Henry George Ward—a phrase which may be either a coarse sarcasm or a homely truth—became the ‘Great Doer of the Age.’

The Bullion Committee sat for three months. On the 6th of May, Mr. Peel, as its chairman, brought up the report; and on the 24th of that month, he rose to propose the resolutions which it embodied. His speech was heralded by one of those dramatic incidents which are so rare in our public proceedings; rare, perhaps, because they really exercise so slight an influence on the conduct of our public men. His father, Sir Robert Peel, in presenting a petition from merchants of the city of London against the proposed change in the currency laws, alluded to the relative positions of himself and his son with respect to the question. Speaking with much emotion, but with the unpretending frankness which marked his parliamentary conduct, he said: ‘To-night I shall have to oppose a very near and dear relative. But while it is my own sentiment that I have a duty to perform, I respect those who do theirs, and who consider that duty to be paramount to all other considerations.

I have mentioned the name of Mr. Pitt. My own impression is certainly a strong one in favour of that great man. All of us have some bias, and I always thought him the first man in the country. I well remember, when the near and dear relative I have alluded to was a child, I observed to some friends, that the man who discharged his duty to his country in the manner Mr. Pitt had done, was the man of all the world to be admired, and the most to be imitated; and I thought at that moment that if my life, and that of my dear relative, should be spared, I would one day present him to his country to follow in the same path. It is very natural that such should be my wish; and I will only say further of him, that though he is deviating from the proper path in this instance, his head and heart are in the right place, and I think they will soon recal him to the right way.'

The son did not pass unnoticed this allusion of his father. At the close of an able and powerful speech, in which he had explained his own reasons for a change of opinion, and the general views of the committee, he said: 'Many other difficulties presented themselves to me in discussing this question: among them is one which it pains me to observe—I mean the necessity I am under of opposing myself to an authority, to which I have always bowed from my youth up, and to which I hope I shall always continue to bow with deference. My excuse is now, that I have a great public duty imposed upon me, and that whatever may be my private feelings, from that duty I must not shrink.'

Into the general arguments urged by the speaker in favour of the new Currency Bill, it is not necessary here to enter. There is a passage, however, in his speech, which not merely illustrates his own

state of mind at the time, but also evidences that moral courage which, later in life, led him to avow his changes of opinion, and to act upon them. In alluding to his opposition to Mr. Horner's resolutions in 1811, he said : ' I am free to say, that in consequence of the evidence we received, and our discussions on it, my own opinions, with regard to the general question, have undergone a material change. I am ready to avow, without shame or remorse, that I went into the committee with very different opinions from those which I at present entertain. My views on the subject were materially different when I voted against the resolutions brought forward in 1811, by Mr. Horner, as the chairman of the Bullion Committee ; but having gone into this inquiry determined to dismiss all former impressions, and to obliterate from my memory the vote which I gave some years back, I resolved to apply to the subject my undivided and unprejudiced attention, and to adopt every inference that authentic information or mature reflection could offer to my mind. The consequence is, that although I should probably, even now, vote, if it were again brought before the House, in opposition to the practical measure formerly recommended, yet I now, with very little modification, concur in the principles laid down in the fourteen first resolutions submitted to our consideration by the very able and much-lamented individual I have named. I conceive those principles to represent the true nature and laws of our monetary system ; and it is without shame or repentance I thus bear testimony to the superior sagacity of one with whose views I agree on this point, although I differed with him so much on many other great political questions. I now feel that that distinguished states-

man's opinions on this subject were such as must render his character still more respected, and his loss still more sensibly felt by the community.'

In this frank declaration, we find one of the great guiding principles of the late Sir Robert Peel's career—one which, in judging his character, it is of importance to bear in mind. The commonly received theory assumes that he obstinately and violently supported the prevailing opinion or system of the hour, until he saw that it was losing its ground; and that then he gained popularity by as ardently embracing its successor. The result produced upon our mind by a very long and careful study of Sir Robert Peel's opinions and conduct is, that he was, from the very outset of his career, engaged in a perpetual process of examination; that he early acquired a habit of looking at the practical side of questions, because his false position forbade his taking them up on the ground of abstract principle; that he arrived, by this process, at conclusions contemporaneously with, and corresponding to, those of the public; and that, having done so, he fearlessly avowed his change of views, and paid honour to those whose foresight or less practical and exacting temperament led them to see the right in the first instance. From his first entrance into public life, he was unconsciously 'letting himself down.' Bred in a school of ultra-Toryism, but unable, from the constitution of his mind, to accept political dogmata without inquiry, he constantly applied to them a test, in the facts which he was yearly and daily accumulating; so that he arrived, at last, at the results sought by the inductive method, but by the opposite process. It was as if a young man had learned to build up beautiful houses and temples, by pulling to pieces

the works of those who had gone before, and gaining wisdom from their faults. So the late Sir Robert Peel elaborately dissected the great political fabric in whose fanes he had been early taught to worship, and then devoted himself to the erection of a new one, on a foundation more solid, with materials more common, in a style less ornate and mediæval, but on a much broader area, and of a capacity and construction more useful to mankind at large. If we would rightly understand this man of many contradictions, we must look at his early character as it was, not through the distorting medium of party misconception. The picture will lose in colour and depth of contrast; but it will gain in truthfulness to nature.

The principles laid down in the resolutions of the Bullion Committee were embodied in a Bill which was afterwards known as 'Peel's Bill,' because the young convert had charge of it in the House. The great change introduced by that measure consisted in the restoration of a metallic basis for the currency. Like all great legislative changes, however, it led to much individual suffering. Contracts made in the flush of a paper circulation had to be fulfilled in a dearer currency; and while the fund-holder, and the man of fixed income generally, gained by the change, the landholder was considered to have been a loser. The advocates of a paper currency in this country have always been remarkable for violence and virulence in their writings and speeches; and the new law and its chief sponsor had to submit to much acrimonious aspersion from writers who sought to curry favour with the classes supposed to have been injured. A war of attack, in which the language used on the one side was scarcely a remove above

slander, and the retorts of Mr. Peel usually resolved themselves into unmerciful quizzing of the extreme propositions of the 'currency doctors,' subsisted for many years. The more vulgar and unphilosophical of the objectors were headed by Cobbett. He indulged to the full in his vehement and vigorous invectives against Mr. Peel, who, however, for many years disdained to notice his coarse assailant. There were frequent discussions in Parliament on the working of the bill. Whenever agricultural distress occurred with more than ordinary intensity, much of the evil was invariably ascribed to the restricted currency. Among many other attempts to impugn or overturn the system was the motion of Mr. Western, in June, 1822, for a committee to inquire into its working, when Mr. Peel expressly laid it down as a principle that the 'standard' of the country should never after be interfered with, except in case of an over-ruling necessity; and in a previous debate, at the opening of the session of that Parliament, Mr. Peel observed that when the bill was passed, and was more popular, he took no merit to himself, but gave all to Mr. Horner; but now, when it was less popular, he still renounced the merit, though embracing its full responsibility. In the same speech he elaborately and warmly defended the principle of cash payments, and predicted permanent good from it to agriculture.

Lord John Russell, in assailing Sir Robert Peel's modified sliding scale, in 1842, spoke of it as 'disturbing, but failing to settle.' However true the phrase was of the particular scheme, it was untrue as a description of Sir Robert Peel's method of legislating. He was always even culpably slow to 'disturb,' but as nervously anxious to 'settle.' A

willing self-deception followed each of his great 'settlements,'—Emancipation, the Currency, Modification of the Corn Laws—as though there were some political god Terminus, whose sanction could be invoked to the fixity and finality of this new boundary. His political opponents, using the licence of party warfare, attributed this habit to a purblind nature, affirming that Sir Robert Peel did not, because he could not, see farther into the future, than to suppose that compromises could consolidate into permanent arrangements. We incline to the presumption that this seemingly limited vision was assumed—that Sir Robert Peel, seeing how the misfortunes of continental states had resulted from changes too violent and sweeping, desired to regulate the action of the public mind. He was like the lock-keeper, who lets the upper water into the vacuum so gently and imperceptibly that the change of altitude is effected without a shock. During the last twenty years of his life he constituted himself a barometer of public opinion. He knew that legislative acts which did not find their counterpart and excuse in public wants, were worse than useless. In public and official intercourse he was always reserved, taciturn. All his party (save a select few) complained that he maintained a cold ambiguity. He could do no less. His position imposed on him a species of negative hypocrisy. But in private, and with his political intimates, how different was the man! To them he did not fear unfolding his ulterior objects, and his faith in the expanding energies of his countrymen. He was as the physician recovering a fever patient, who dare not tell of the day when he will prescribe a nourishing and invigorating diet. His political changes went on

the principle which demands from joint-stock companies a certain deposit before they can incorporate; or on that of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who will not advance money for building a church, till the promoters have subscribed the like sum. He 'doled out' legislation; and each time talked of finality, because he well knew that though men might be building on sand, yet, unless they believed it to be *terra firma*, there was no hope for commerce.

The currency question formed a great exception to this strange method of 'settling.' Sir Robert Peel always adhered to his views of 1819. What he did afterwards was designed to give them more force and a more general application. Year after year he defended the great principles laid down in 'Peel's Bill.' In the first years of his second and last administration, he used all his eloquence and official power to give them additional force and efficiency—and when, in the autumn of 1847, the terrible commercial panic occurred, he looked on with a stoical coolness till the very moment of the impending crash; as the Medicus of old would watch the victim on the rack, till the instant when the agonizing tension was about to end in death.

It was this steadfastness that drove his antagonists to fury. We have already recalled one dramatic incident that attended the introduction of 'Peel's Bill.' Another occurred about fifteen years after it had been in successful operation, which excited the deepest interest at the time, and on which the future narrator will dwell in his search for the salient points of our cotemporary history. Cobbett, now a garrulous old man who had survived his once great popularity, had yet been returned to Parliament for Oldham, through the influence of his

admirer, Mr. John Feilden. Cobbett, always in vulgar extremes, used his parliamentary privilege to give effect to his *Register* diatribes against Sir Robert Peel. In 1833, he proposed a lengthy motion, the effect of which was to pray the king to dismiss that statesman from his privy council, as the author of the bill of 1819, which had been the cause of the distress of the country. A long, and though occasionally violent, a feeble speech from Cobbett ushered in the motion, which was seconded by the *Fidus Achates* aforesaid. Sir Robert answered him in a magnificent speech, of which the most remarkable passage, though it has often been quoted, will bear repetition here. After an elaborate refutation of all Cobbett's arguments, and a scornful repudiation of the implied accusation, that he had himself gained by the change of currency, Sir Robert burst forth in these words:—
'It is on public grounds that the hon. member assails me. The hon. member has not the same motives for attacking me which he has had for attacking others. I have never lent the hon. member my confidence; from me, the hon. member has never received any obligation. His object in assailing me is, doubtless, to strike terror by the threat of his denunciations,—to discourage opposition from the fear of being signalized as a victim. But I tell the gentlemen of England, that their best security is in boldly facing and defying such insidious efforts. God forbid that the hon. member's speculations on the prospect of public confusion should be realized. I labour under no anxiety that they will. I feel confident, that whatever may be the political differences that divide public men, all who are interested in the upholding of law and property will unite in their defence

to put down such attempts. Not only would it be the bitterest calamity, but a calamity embittered by the greatest disgrace, to live under such an ignoble tyranny as he would impose.

Come the eleventh plague, rather than this should be ;

Come sink us rather in the sea ;

Come, rather, pestilence, and reap us down ;

Come God's sword, rather than our own.

Let rather Roman come again,

Or Saxon, Norman, or the Dane.

In all the bonds we ever bore,

We grieved, we sighed, we wept ;—we never blushed before.

Blush indeed we shall, if we submit to this base and vulgar domination ; and I for one, believing as I do, that I have been selected as an object of attack, for the purpose of discouraging resistance to the insidious efforts which the hon. gentleman is daily making to weaken the foundations of property and the authority of the law, I will, at least, preserve myself from the reproach of having furthered the objects he has in view, by any symptom of intimidation or submission.'

The passage from old Abraham Cowley, delivered with the fine sonorous voice and lofty manner into which Sir Robert Peel fell in moments of *real* excitement, produced an electrical effect. Well we remember the scene. Cobbett, his grey hairs pleading for his sincerity, had been heard as a duty, but with regret. His antagonist had borne himself along on the rising sympathy of the House. Rarely, indeed, does the British senate even *seem* to do injustice ; but now, the disgust of the listeners, and their excitement under Sir Robert's stirring address, overpowered all forms. Cobbett rose, was met with a shout almost of execration, retired to his seat, rose again, again

was met with an indignant repulse, once more and yet once more essayed to speak against the storm of passion, till at last he staggered to his place beside his seconder, for the first time perhaps in his life utterly quelled by his fellow-men. The accused statesman, gathering himself up with dignity, declared he would not vote on a question so personal to himself, and left the house majestically amidst a hurricane of cheers. Four members only, John O'Connell, Thomas Attwood, James Roe, and Patrick Leader, were found supporting Cobbett and Feilden, while the voters for Peel numbered two hundred and ninety-eight ! Then came an incident scarcely less dramatic. Lord Althorp, the whig chief of the House, moved that the resolution should be *expunged from the journals*. On a division there were still only four against the motion, Feargus O'Connor supplying the place of John O'Connell ; and, the votes on the other side amounting to 295, the resolution of Lord Althorp was carried out. From this time forth Sir Robert Peel heard no more of these coarse and malignant imputations.

VI.

IN 1822 Mr. Peel again accepted office—as Secretary of State for the Home Department, in place of Lord Sidmouth. He discharged the duties of that post with dignity, firmness, and temper, during a period of no ordinary difficulty, in the face of an Opposition who carried on a harassing warfare, and with a people who had become discontented and even turbulent under the effects of

the reaction that had followed the long war. His parliamentary speeches during this period were chiefly confined to the routine business of his department, except that he offered a continuous though not a bigoted opposition to the Roman-catholic claims. He was, however, far more usefully employed as an administrative officer.

The same good fortune that had associated his name with currency reform while an independent member of Parliament, now identified him, as a member of the government, with measures of vast social importance. For many years enlightened and philanthropic men had sought to lessen the rigours of a barbarous penal code, and a scarcely less barbarous executive system of punishment. Bentham, but more especially Romilly, and after him Mackintosh, had by incessant parliamentary and printed arguments, effectually aroused the attention and touched the sympathies of the public. The death of Romilly having left the subject in the hands of Mackintosh, that distinguished man had carried in the House of Commons a resolution to the effect, that in the next session they would take into consideration the means of increasing the efficacy of the criminal laws by abating their undue rigour. An intimation was conveyed, that the government were preparing measures on the subject; which was at last, though not without reluctance, left in their hands. Not to enter too minutely into the history of the proceedings, it may suffice to say, that between 1824 and 1827, Mr. Peel prepared and carried various measures, with the full approval of Parliament, by which many capital punishments were abolished, and the general severity of the criminal code essentially mitigated. To Mr. Peel was due the merit of a

most careful and laborious investigation of the subject, a minute examination of the various statutes, and their general arrangement into one comprehensive system. His own opinion of his own share in this great work was very modestly expressed by him while introducing the most important of the measures. He succinctly described the work, too, when he said that it was his object to abolish every part of the criminal statutes that could not with safety be acted upon, and to accommodate the laws relating to crime to the present circumstances of the country and the improved state of society. He subsequently followed up the subject, and, in the year 1830, proposed a measure to limit the punishment of death in cases of forgery. We may also here refer to that great and most salutary reform, for which we are indebted to Sir Robert Peel, the destruction of the old system of watching the metropolis, and the establishment of the new police—a body of men which still goes by the name of ‘Peelers’ with the mob, who thus pay an involuntary tribute to the minister who carried out that most valuable arrangement. We might have swelled the catalogue of Mr. Peel’s services, if we had extended our vision from those views which he embodied in Acts of Parliament to those which he often urged on Parliament. His speeches are rich in suggestions of the most varied kind. But it was really as the ‘doer,’ the agent of other men’s propositions, that the late Sir Robert Peel rendered such inestimable service to his country, by bringing to the task of legislation and administration his clear and methodical intellect, and his cool, practical, calculating habits of mind.

On the nomination of Mr. Canning to the premiership, in April, 1827, Mr. Peel, with other

members of the administration of Lord Liverpool, declined to serve under him. Mr. Peel's motives, and the imputations to which he was subjected, will be treated of subsequently.

When, after the death of Canning, and the abortive attempt of Lord Goderich to carry on the government, the Duke of Wellington occupied office as Prime Minister, Mr. Peel resumed his old post as Secretary of State for the Home Department.

VII.

THE year 1828 commences another era in the life of Sir Robert Peel. His change of opinion on the currency question had involved some personal considerations of a perplexing if not of a painful character, but it had in no material respect altered his relations with his party or with the public. He was now about to make a still greater sacrifice: he was on the eve of changing, not his opinions, but his course of conduct, on a question of far more widely-spread interest, though of inferior importance. Believing that the time was come when his duty demanded a change of measures, he did not hesitate to leap the gulf which he knew must afterwards yawn between him and his most cherished political associations. The question of Catholic emancipation, for nearly half a century a subject of regular parliamentary contention, had now been transferred to another arena. The claims of the Catholics to civil and religious equality had been advocated by some of the greatest men this country had produced. Burke, Grattan, Curran, William Pitt, Fox, Canning, Erskine, Romilly,

Mackintosh, and Brougham ; all had appealed in vain in their favour against the settled resolve of the sovereign, and the ready concurrence of the people. At length the strategic genius of O'Connell invented a machinery more potent than eloquence, or even than the occasional votes of either House of Parliament. To a dogged obstruction he opposed an active force. The most enlightened men of the time were prepared for a change ; but they had no sufficient plea, either with the sovereign or with the public, to justify a departure from what was considered the Protestant form of the constitution. O'Connell provided them with this plea. By organizing the millions of Catholics under a system which he could direct with a nod, he rendered the functions of government practically impossible. The question of emancipation had for many years past disorganized the politics of England. Mr. Pitt had thrown up office in 1801, because King George the Third refused to grant emancipation, which had been promised to the Irish people as one condition of the repeal of the Union. The Whigs, in their turn, were driven from office, after a few months' tenure under Fox and Grenville, upon the same question ; and every political combination, from that period until 1829, had been embarrassed by the difficulty of reconciling political allegiance with religious opinions. Thus there was every reason on the part of the government of the day, for wishing a speedy and effectual solution of this great national difficulty.

Mr. Peel had for many years been looked upon as the most able parliamentary champion of the system of exclusion ; he was the favourite of the churchmen, and the chosen representative of the University of Oxford. He appeared to be the

last man from whom could have been expected concessions to the Roman Catholics ; and this feeling gave increased vigour to the movements of the agitators in Ireland, when they found a Wellington administration in power, with Mr. Peel as Home Secretary. Mr. O'Connell, with his native shrewdness, seems better to have understood the real political character of Mr. Peel. One might suppose that before determining to push his aggressive tactics to an extreme, he had most carefully examined every declaration ever made by the Home Secretary, whether as chief secretary for Ireland, or as an independent member, or in the office which he now filled. For if he had done so, he would have seen, that however steady had been Mr. Peel's opposition from year to year, the principle of expediency always lurked under his arguments. He never opposed the emancipation of the Catholics from antagonism to their religion, but always rested his arguments on political grounds. The difficulty in this country presenting itself to the statesman is, that he cannot easily ascertain what really is the public opinion. Sometimes, as upon this Catholic question, the representatives are in advance of the constituency; at others, as in the case of the corn law question, the public have decided upon a change, even while Parliament has seemed to be opposed to it. However urgent were the arguments of the advocates of emancipation—however encouraging had been occasional divisions in their favour, it was well known that public opinion was not equally advanced in the same direction. It was also notorious that the late king had been always sternly opposed to emancipation, and that George the Fourth had manifested similar opinions, though with less obstinacy.

But a few months had elapsed since Mr. Peel had refused to serve under Mr. Canning, expressly because that statesman was avowedly the advocate of emancipation. That he should so soon after have himself introduced the measure he then condemned, appeared to involve an inexplicable inconsistency. The vulgar mind took refuge in the imputation of treachery and disappointed ambition; but Mr. Canning himself absolved Mr. Peel from this charge.

There is but one possible explanation of this and other glaring inconsistencies in the career of the late Sir Robert Peel. It is that he instinctively adapted himself to the circumstances in which he was placed. He lived through a period when the rest of Europe was convulsed. He knew that public opinion had become strongly impressed with the necessity for various changes. On the Catholic question, although the English public could not be said to show a majority in its favour, the attitude assumed by the people of Ireland more than counterbalanced this constitutional deficiency; and we can quite understand how Mr. Peel could, in 1827, decline to be a party to a measure which then was hopeless of success, and yet in 1829 could himself propose that measure—not because he thought any better of it than before, but because necessity compelled him to yield to a manifestation of public opinion, however spurious he might consider it to be. This is a very prosaic mode of dealing with a subject so tempting in dramatic contrasts as the inconsistencies, tergiversations, and treacheries to party and personal friendships, which marked the career of the late Sir Robert Peel. It is, however, the only mode of satisfactorily treating the subject; more especially that experience has shown that other

statesmen, however sincere their convictions, have been compelled to resort to the same mode of accommodating the limitations assigned in past times to the constitution, with the expansion of public opinion. That a thing *could* be done, was Sir Robert Peel's reason why it *ought to be* done. He had long recognised the desirableness of changes before admitting their necessity.

It is not necessary here to repeat the minor incidents of this great crisis in Sir Robert Peel's career, inasmuch as our object is to trace his general motives. The return of Mr. O'Connell for the county of Clare, although it was known that he could not sit, was an evidence of the lengths to which the Catholic leaders were prepared to go. On the other hand, the Protestants in Ireland, exasperated at these proceedings, became highly excited, and their mutual enmity almost threatened civil strife. During the parliamentary recess following the Clare election, Mr. Dawson, Mr. Peel's brother-in-law, who had been a stanch anti-Catholic, announced himself favourable to emancipation. Close upon this came the Duke of Wellington's letter to Dr. Curtis, the Catholic primate of Ireland, in which he hinted at a settlement; a letter which was eagerly published. It was also favourably commented upon by no less a person than the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Matters were not yet ripe, however; and although in their own minds ministers had resolved on the change, they deemed it necessary to repudiate Lord Anglesey's indiscretion by recalling him from Ireland; while Mr. Peel preserved a silence as to his altered views, although he appeared in public during the recess. The explanation of all this ambiguity is to be found in the difficulty expe-

rienced by ministers in obtaining the consent of the king. It was not until they had actually resigned their offices that they received the requisite authority.

‘An overpowering sense of public duty’ was the plea urged by Mr. Peel to the University of Oxford for his change of conduct. It did not avail. He honourably resigned his seat, and then appealed to his constituents. They elected Sir Robert Inglis; but as he obtained a majority of 146 only, upon 1364 votes, it is evident that a large minority agreed in the prudence of Mr. Peel’s proceedings. During the interval between this event and Mr. Peel’s return for Westbury, he was virulently attacked by the ultra-Protestant party. It is interesting to find him earnestly defended by a gentleman who had then ever been his consistent opponent, but who lived to become his associate in the government, and his political heir. Sir James Graham spoke of him as a really honest and conscientious man, pleading his sacrifice of cherished convictions, public and private, and the danger of civil war averted by his manly avowal of his change of opinion. In the speech with which Mr. Peel, on the fifth of March, introduced the Emancipation Act, he said he had resigned the struggle longer to maintain the Catholic disabilities, *believing that there were not adequate materials or sufficient instruments for their effectual and permanent continuance.* He yielded, he said, to a *moral necessity which he could not control*, unwilling as he was to push resistance to a point which might endanger the establishments he wished to defend.

At the same time, Mr. Peel urged a plea more in accordance with the established customs of Par-

liament, and with the recognised action of the constitution. Although the Catholic Association really “carried” the emancipation question, a majority of the House of Commons had, in 1828, decided in favour of some settlement of the dispute. This was on the motion of Sir Francis Burdett. The majority, it is true, was very small—only six in a house of 538—but still it *was* a majority, and, as such, could be cited by Mr. Peel as one of the reasons for his change of conduct. To have referred the altered views of the government to out-of-doors intimidation alone, would have been seriously to compromise the dignity of Parliament; yet it was perfectly well known that the determined attitude of the Irish Catholics, followed up by the return of O’Connell for Clare county, had been the real cause of the change. In 1825, a considerable majority of the House of Commons had decided in favour of the Catholic claims. Mr. Peel at once waited on Lord Liverpool, the Prime Minister, and intimated that, as the minister ‘responsible for the good government of Ireland,’ he could not carry on the government of that country against an adverse House of Commons. He intimated his wish to resign; but Lord Liverpool’s reply was that the resignation of the Home Secretary would be followed by his own, and that, as a necessary consequence, it would break up the administration. Mr. Peel had commenced public life under Lord Liverpool, and he did not choose to be the cause of his retirement from office. For that reason he remained, on the understanding that there should be an appeal to the country. The result was a House of Commons opposed to emancipation. When, in 1828, this Parliament (by the small majority already mentioned) changed

its views on the question, Mr. Peel again expressed (to the Duke of Wellington, then Premier,) his intention to resign. But by this time there were other concurrent reasons for a change of policy ; and Mr. Peel told his chief that, as an independent member of Parliament, he should do his utmost to carry a measure of Catholic emancipation. Ultimately, rather than break up the administration, he resolved himself to propose the measure, to 'take all the personal consequences of originating and enforcing, as a minister, the very measure he had theretofore opposed.' He would not allow himself any merit. 'The credit,' he exclaimed, 'belongs not to me, but to others. It belongs to Fox, to Grattan, to Plunkett—to the gentlemen opposite, (alluding to Mr. Brougham and his Whig friends,) *and to an illustrious friend of mine, who is now no more.* By their efforts, in spite of my opposition, it has proved victorious.' Yet on the very day before the measure was proposed to Parliament by Mr. Peel, he, the Duke of Wellington, and Lord Lyndhurst, had been compelled to tender their resignations to the king, ere they could wring from his convictions or his politic reluctance a formal consent to its introduction.

The allusion to 'his illustrious friend' (Mr. Canning) reminds us of the position in which Mr. Peel stood towards that statesman. Before that time, and after, he was accused of treachery towards 'his illustrious friend.' As lately as the year 1846, Mr. Disraeli and Lord George Bentinck, with an almost indecent virulence, charged Sir Robert Peel with having 'hunted Mr. Canning to death.' At the time to which we now refer, March 1829, the same accusation was hurled at Mr. Peel, with all

the bitterness and rancour of party hatred and revenge. He, the official proposer of emancipation, had but two short years before resigned office, together with all the strength of the ministry, on finding that Canning had been named by George the Fourth to the premiership. His reason assigned in the House of Commons for this conduct was, that 'he had taken, from the first moment of his public life, an active and decided part on a great and vital question—that of the extension of political privileges to the Roman Catholics. His opposition was founded *on principle*. He thought that *the continuance of those bars, which prevented the acquisition of political power by the Catholics, was necessary for the maintenance of the constitution, and the interests of the Established Church.*' Knowing that Mr. Canning was pledged to the removal of the Catholic disabilities, he could not continue a member of a ministry prepared to act on such a policy.

Upon this passage in Sir Robert Peel's history, much eloquent nonsense has been written. 'Sentimentalism' in politics leads astray the judgment. To the historian or the orator, it is tempting to leave the dead level of commonplace facts, and the routine of party etiquette, and to pursue the vision of one statesman 'hunting another to death.' The partisan may paint in glowing colours the horrors or the turpitude of such conduct in the man against whose reputation he is pleading; but the judge and the jury must look to the prosaic facts. If Mr. Canning himself expressly exculpated Mr. Peel, in the most emphatic language, we may afford to dismiss the *personal* view of the question. In point of fact, personal considerations had but little to do with the question. It was a matter of

party tactics and public opinion. Mr. Peel had from the first opposed the Catholics, not as religionists, but as subject to a foreign influence, and difficult to restrain if they once obtained political power. Subsequent events have demonstrated that his view was at least true in fact, however wrong the advocates of unlimited freedom may conceive it to have been in principle. In 1827, even if Mr. Canning could have carried the measure in the House of Commons, it is very doubtful whether the House of Peers and the Crown would have made it law. Mr. Peel and his seceding colleagues would then have made only a fruitless sacrifice of their character and influence with their party. Bigots would have taken their places as Tory leaders, and the question would still have remained where it was. But in 1828 and 1829, matters had wholly changed. *Necessity*, the statesman's excuse, compelled. The Emancipation Act was yielded to something not very far short of force; and if it fell to Mr. Peel to propose it to parliament—in spite of his reluctance to cover his character with the disgrace of inconsistency—that must be attributed to his great political eminence, and the reluctance of his friends to part with his services; not to a deliberate treachery towards one who had ever been his personal friend, as well as his political associate, and who warmly defended him from imputations provoked by the sudden and combined resignation in 1827. The movements of party may in this respect be compared to those of a tortoise; that, although the head is flexible and sensitive, the body is slow to be moved. A Canning, a Peel, a Stanley, may be enlightened, liberal-minded, advanced beyond contemporaries; but they cannot change their positions without that

dull and heavy mass, that body which is necessary to their life while it so clogs and weighs down their motions.

VIII.

IN his opposition to the Reform Bill, Sir Robert Peel was in all probability as sincere and earnest; and to this, perhaps, may be added the readiness with which his leadership was accepted even by those Tories who were most pained and indignant at what they held to have been a misdirection of conversation on the Catholic question. There were personal as well as political reasons why he should be viewed with considerable mistrust as a threatened change in the constitution and character of parliament. To the excited apprehensions of the Tory party, that change loomed menacingly as a revolution; not political only, but in the very laws of parliamentary discussion. They feared nothing less than that the House of Commons, to use Mr. Disraeli's words, would be 'degraded into a vestry.' Those who had achieved an influence over the House, feared that the old courtesies, and the habit of veiling personalities, would be abandoned for coarser methods of influencing opinion; that the skilled orator would be obliged to yield the arena to the raw demagogue. Sir Robert Peel had for many years fulfilled the functions of 'leader,' as it is termed. Laboriously he had trained himself for that post, subduing a naturally impulsive character, preparing his argumentative weapons for a kind of strife in which broad principles were of less frequent use than dialectic finesse, and by a gravity of demeanour and general persuasiveness of man-

ner, only occasionally varied by passages of eloquence as laboriously, though not so successfully, imitated from approved models, he had gradually surmounted many difficulties, natural and self-created, and had arrived, though with a reputation for mediocrity, at a degree of influence over the House of Commons, such as had only, in more recent years, been yielded to the genius of Canning. It is not difficult to conceive that Sir Robert Peel, profoundly mistrusting the political prudence of the Whigs, and fortified in his general faith by the unanimity of his political associates against reform, although divided on Catholic emancipation, did unconsciously to himself contemplate, with peculiar dread, the demolition of what he had, during so many years, built up, and that he should have foreseen how useless, against violent gusts of popular passions, would be all his hardly-learned skill in the art of setting his sails or trimming his course. Time showed that these apprehensions were as groundless as were the political fears of his party of the general consequences of a large measure of parliamentary reform. Sir Robert Peel lived to exercise in the more numerous assembly an influence much greater and more legitimate than that which he had begun to wield in the old.

It is among the speeches made by Sir Robert Peel against the Reform Bill that we find the first conclusive evidences of that extraordinary grasp, elasticity of mind, and fertility in argumentative resource, which afterwards rendered him the undisputed master of the House of Commons in right of his powers as a speaker, and independently of the influence he possessed as the leader of a great party. During his previous career, he ap-

peared always as if dealing with questions in a provisional way, postponing the discussion of principles, and satisfying his audience with arguments of a temporary character, or addressed to matters of detail. But now he seemed thoroughly in earnest, as though he could not have a doubt or a reserved thought upon the question. It is easy to impute this comparative earnestness to personal ambition, seeking as a means his reinstatement in the leadership of his party; or to political bigotry, actuated by a blind faith in aristocracy, and a slavish reverence for the existing remnant of a domination transmitted in one shape or other since the Conquest. Neither solution is satisfactory. Personal ambition would have prompted the late Sir Robert Peel to assume the leadership of a larger and more national party, after the golden opinions he won by the measure of 1829; and as for any superstitious respect for aristocracy, it may be urged that the peculiar social position of Sir Robert Peel furnishes a sufficient answer to the suggestion. He was a Conservative from conviction, not by inheritance or sympathy; nor, when associating his name with measures that were branded as revolutionary, did he ever fail to impress on the nation that he adopted them in the true spirit of Conservatism, as physicians use dangerous remedies in desperate cases.

It comes not within the scope of this biography to recall the changeful phases of that contest. Sir Robert Peel had never before so shone as a debater. If the nomination system could have been saved by ingenuity of argument, by exhaustive analysis, by exalted eloquence, by predictions of impending evil fortified by appalling examples from the past, and by the devoted, the desperate earnestness of

one notoriously learned in constitutional lore, and who had so recently given a glorious proof that he was not of a stubborn and obstructive nature ; nay, if the decision on that important question had rested solely with his audience in the House of Commons, uninfluenced by the thunders of the press and the attitude of the democracy, it is hard to conceive but that he must so far have won the day as to have commanded a compromise, and have apportioned the newly-created representative power more fairly and equally among parties and classes. If the sagacious cunning and persuasiveness of a Scarlett, the technical knowledge and dexterity of a Campbell, the massive reasoning and commanding eloquence of a Lyndhurst, had been combined in one advocate, he could not have surpassed the Tory leader in his efforts to save the old system of government. From the broadest and most philosophic treatment, down to the most skilful forensic handling of detail, his advocacy presented the most masterly grasp and the most wondrous versatility. To appreciate such efforts, it is not necessary to sympathize with their object. Opponents and adherents alike admired. Theretofore Sir Robert Peel had rather seemed the master of plausible fallacy, of logical dexterity, of convenient expediency. Now he came forth as a champion of what he at least converted into a great constitutional cause, and astonished all by his combined courage and plasticity. The secret lay in the fact that he was now really, personally in earnest. But nothing could withstand the popular torrent. During the debates, and while the fate of the measure hung on the reluctance of the king and the premier to coerce the House of Lords into adopting it, the attempt was made to effect a modification or compromise.

Those who had refused all, now thought that the public would be satisfied with the concession of a part. Earl Grey and Lord Brougham having at length resolved on the desperate alternative of creating peers, and the king having then refused his assent, the ministers resigned. It was now that Sir Robert Peel first received brevet rank as Prime Minister.

The king had sent for Lord Lyndhurst, to communicate his wishes to the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel, to the effect that he was desirous that they should form an administration on the basis of an extensive measure of reform. The Duke, true to his military instincts, immediately desired to obey his sovereign's wishes; but Sir Robert Peel, who better understood the real perils of the crisis, declined to accept the premiership, in the belief that it was impossible to modify the Whig measure, or on the other hand to propose a new one that would be acceptable to the excited appetite of the people. Sir Robert Peel in this respect evinced the sagacity which now began to distinguish his career. He was earnestly opposed to the scheme of parliamentary reform, as being at once rash, sweeping, and incomplete; he foresaw too, that the Whigs would soon meet the fate of all popular idols; and he believed that he was better serving the interests of his party by waiting until a period when concessions from them would be accepted as a boon, not submitted to under the influence of popular violence. Sir Robert Peel's counsels prevailed over the reluctance of the king, and the result was, we need not say, that the Whigs were left to complete the work they had begun. Sir Robert Peel, however, was not therefore idle; his tactics resolved themselves into a scheme

for robbing the Whigs of the fruits for which they had sacrificed on the altar of democracy. Having declined the formal encounter, he now applied himself to the task of beating his adversaries in detail. But the forces he had at command for this work were wholly inadequate. The Tory party was utterly destroyed under the influence of the violent popular excitement, which had returned an overwhelming majority for the Whigs. The popularity, too, of the Grey administration was so enormous as to defy all attempts to shake it, until errors were committed, or internal dissensions arose. The resolute manner in which Sir Robert Peel had resisted the reform agitation, had completely restored to him the confidence of the Tories; but to counterbalance this advantage he had to deplore the loss of numbers. He first applied himself to the reconstruction of his party, as furnishing him with the troops for the coming campaign. At first he could not make much impression; but gradually the Whigs themselves supplied him with the means and the opportunity. The Radical followers of Earl Grey expected to see the same fever-heat of reformation kept up; while the aristocratic portion of the party thought that already too much had been done. Sir Robert Peel skillfully availed himself of the opportunity furnished by this schism; although, for a considerable time, he was unable to do more than remind the public that the Tory party was still in existence, though sorely diminished in numbers and strength. Sir Robert Peel commenced his campaign of opposition with a measure of great prudence. The name of 'Tory' had become odious in the popular ear; he substituted for it a more significant and elastic, and a less offensive designation—that of 'Conservative;'

which the party led by Sir Robert Peel still continued to preserve; although when Lord George Bentinck, Lord Stanley, and Mr. Disraeli seceded from the banner of their former chieftain, they ostentatiously resumed the old party name of 'Tory.' Sir Robert Peel's tactics were necessarily rather of a defensive than of an offensive character, his object being to let the Whigs 'wear out their welcome,' and at the same time to exhibit his own party before the public in a less unamiable light than that which had been for a long time assigned to them. In the mean while, changes had taken place, both in the personnel and the popularity of the Whig ministry. The resignation of the present Lord Derby, of the Duke of Richmond, Sir James Graham, and the Earl of Ripon, and subsequently of Earl Grey himself, deprived the ministry of much strength and prestige; and the time did not appear to have arrived at which they could with any safety seek support from the ultras of their party. At last, the death of Earl Spencer having furnished the king with a pretext for dismissing the ministry, his majesty, on the advice of the Duke of Wellington, commanded Sir Robert Peel back from Rome, whither he had gone on a tour of recreation. Pending his return, the Duke of Wellington, almost single-handed, carried on the government. At length, in the early part of December, 1834, Sir Robert Peel arrived in London, accepted office as Prime Minister, and immediately constructed an administration.

IX.

WE have now reached another great epoch in the mental history of Sir Robert Peel. He

had arrived at the highest eminence attainable by a subject in this country ; and in order to attain that eminence he had made no flagrant sacrifice of principle. Still, as the Tory party was under the ban of public disapprobation, and the Whigs still commanded a numerical majority in the House of Commons, the country looked with no small curiosity and doubt on an attempt by a Tory minister to carry on the government in the face of the notorious desire of the public for reform.

The Tamworth manifesto partly set at rest these doubts and speculations. That was a state paper of no ordinary significance. It might be said to have been the first real fruit of the Reform Bill ; because it for the first time exhibited the minister of the day taking the people into his confidence and councils. Sir Robert Peel by that manifesto accepted the Reform Bill as a *fait accompli*, but denied that there was for the Whigs any especial and exclusive mission to govern the empire. He proclaimed as the great principle of the new government the maintenance of institutions and the reformation of abuses ; by which it was understood that he objected to further organic reform, but approved of reform in detail. Looking back at these events with the advantage of subsequent experience, we do not so readily perceive the importance then attached to this movement of Sir Robert Peel. Yet it was signally sagacious and well-timed, holding the balance between the retro-active tendencies of the majority of his own supporters, and the mad passion for change with which the events (foreign as well as domestic) of the last four years had inspired the people. Without doubt it removed from the newly baptised Conservative party a heavy weight of popular prejudice, and ren-

dered it buoyant in the public hope. Upon Sir Robert Peel's political adversaries it fell like a bolt from heaven ; as they had inferred from the negative opposition offered to them, that the new Tory ministry would be rampant on the old Tory prejudices. A palace intrigue had ejected Lord Melbourne ; but the Tamworth manifesto converted it into a peaceful social revolution, and lent to the new administration a moral sanction even greater than that arrogated by the late government, inasmuch as it presented the aristocracy in the amiable character of voluntary conceders to the wishes of the public. In studying the character of Sir Robert Peel, we must never forget that this was entirely his own act ; and that although in carrying Catholic Emancipation and repeal of the Corn Laws, he enacted a more brilliant and distinguished part, in his government of 1834 he had the merit of taking the initiative.

In his personal demeanour, this event worked a miraculous change. It is one test of greatness to grow with the occasion. Sir Robert Peel found himself in face of immense difficulties. A dissolution of parliament proved that the Whig majority, although diminished was not destroyed ; and the ejected chiefs, transported with mortification and rage, had resolved to spare no efforts that could once more rally round them their estranged supporters, and carry Downing-street with a *coup de main*. The public at large were not slow to recognise in the position of Sir Robert Peel a parallel with that of Pitt when called to power by George III., and opposed to a coalition. Pitt himself was not more impressively dignified under those difficulties, than was Sir Robert Peel, now that he had to combat the new coalition of the Whigs, Radicals,

and the Irish Roman-catholic members, as yet too wanting the aid which might be expected from Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham. It was now that the full proportions of the statesman's mind developed themselves. Once before he had astonished mankind by an exhibition of moral courage, which party passions prevented their fully appreciating; but now he was no longer bound to the degrading necessity of pleading with his own followers that he was externally coerced. All the measures he introduced, although they fell short of the exaggerated demands of demagogues, bore the stamp of a practical liberalism; while his speeches, in their loftiness of tone and self-sustaining independence, foreshadowed that mastery of the public mind which, from 1841 to 1846, he converted into a dictatorship. Even the parliamentary tactics of his government were a practical appeal from the old laws of party warfare, an admission that something more than mere numbers must enter into the calculations of him who could work the newly organized machinery of the constitution. Paradoxical though it may seem, even while refusing to resign on adverse votes, on mere questions of form, he was really asserting the representative principle; because he regarded those votes as the result of factious combinations formed under the influence of temporary excitement, and he declined to recognise them as involving his resignation, until they were expressed on some great question of principle which must have deeply occupied the thoughts of the members of the House of Commons. Something, too, was due to his sovereign, who in the exercise of his prerogative, had summarily dismissed the ministry wielding a majority in the House of Commons; nor was the new premier unmindful

of the interests of his own party, which demanded that the Tamworth manifesto should be placed on record in specific parliamentary propositions. The period from February to April, 1835, when Sir Robert Peel at last succumbed before the coalition, must be regarded as the most remarkable of his life; not because in 1846 he did not occupy a position and enact a character far more eminent and illustrious in the eyes of mankind, but because it was now that his character first became stamped with individuality, and he rose from being a mouth-piece of his party to be really their leader and their lawgiver.

Once more in opposition Sir Robert Peel recommenced his opposition tactics. He had exposed enough of the spirit of the new dispensation of Toryism, to leave on the public mind a favourable impression, while he had the advantage of appealing to the Protestant spirit of the country against the alliance of the Whigs with O'Connell and the Irish Catholics. Those who are prepared to condemn Sir Robert Peel, because, having once made use of the Protestant party he afterwards made concessions to the Catholics in Ireland greater than the Whigs had proposed, had better abandon the study of contemporary history and shut themselves up with their fixed ideas. Sir Robert Peel, in the struggle to attain power, did what almost every statesman has done before and since: he made use of the weapons and powers which he found ready to his hand, and he did not think that when installed in office he was bound to reproduce in acts of parliament all the exaggerated expectations either of his friends or of his opponents. These are questions about which ideologists and sentimental politicians have sermonized in all times, and about which they will

still continue to distract their judgment. The current of events runs on in spite of them, and strong-minded men will still continue to carry out their purposes regardless of past professions, whenever it happens that their personal ambition marches with the wishes of the public, or can be made instrumental to the public good. Without entering into the details of the parliamentary campaign between April, 1835, and August, 1841, we may generally characterize the tactics of Sir Robert Peel as having exhibited the most consummate dexterity. He gradually disembarrassed himself of every tie that could render him dependent on his own party, while at the same time he steadily declined to compromise himself with the democratic section of his opponents. His celebrated declaration, that he considered himself as the state physician, who could not be called upon to advise without his fee, aptly described his position. Actively assailant to the extent necessary to harass and disorganize the government, sufficiently enthusiastic on behalf of the old objects of Tory idolatry to keep up the courage of his supporters, he maintained a prudent silence as to the measures he would propose if circumstances placed him in power. His greatest difficulty was to restrain the eagerness of his own followers, constantly tempted by the opportunities thrown in their way by the cunning or the incapacity of the Whigs. He had not only to refuse the means of obtaining power, but actually to invent pretexts for declining office when forced upon him. The result of this combination of abstinence and adroit assault was, that when at last he had worried the Whigs to the last stage of attenuation, and was able to walk over the defunct party into office, he stood perfectly unpledged to any specific prin-

ciple or measure, but had enveloped his plans in such vague generalities as to leave him comparatively a free agent. How far this line of conduct was consistent with public morality it is not necessary here to determine, except so far as emphatically to declare that the use made by Sir Robert Peel of power when attained was in accordance with that highest morality of statesmen which binds them above all things to consider what is most for the public good. Sir Robert Peel's supporters, or many of them, supposed that he was coming into office expressly to maintain the Corn Laws, to restrain the Irish Catholics, and generally to oppose the advancing tide of democracy. Sir Robert Peel himself did not condescend, except to a few intimates and equals, to explain in what direction his plans tended. Even when he dissolved parliament and found himself reinforced by a Conservative majority of ninety-one, he stood unfettered and unpledged. The Whigs had utterly frittered away the immense favour with which, ten years before, the public had regarded them: Sir Robert Peel was at that time accepted, not so much because the public felt confidence in him, as that they did not feel confidence in anyone else. When, after an interval of angry recrimination instigated by the Whigs, the new minister at length came to parliament with his financial scheme, if his own supporters were astonished at so sudden a change, and his party opponents were enraged at seeing their favourite plans taken up by their political antagonist, the public and the press were not slow to perceive that at last the helm was grasped by a master, one who had the courage to assert himself in the face of mankind, and to use for the benefit of the whole nation the trust originally reposed in him for the benefit of a section.

X.

OF the position of Sir Robert Peel during the first years of his second administration, the following passage, published at the time by the present writer, affords a fair picture :—

‘Sir Robert Peel is alone among living statesmen. A studied mystery enwraps his purposes : a cold reserve repels political friendship. His contemporaries feel his power : the later annals of his country bear witness to the active influence of his mind. Yet no one speaks well of him ; he is even charged with not having a friend. Anathemas have been hurled at him by his party, which would have withered a weaker moral nature, or crushed a less pliable one. The praise he gets comes from his former enemies, and even that is diminutive. The Tories fear him ; the Whigs hate him ; the Chartists affect to despise him. Those who look back, and regret the past, accuse him of treachery. Those who look forward and contemplate the future, —the men who would govern empires by theories revived from the obsolete, or framed upon the possible,—ridicule his pretensions to practical statesmanship, his bit-by-bit legislation. They say he is governing without a principle of government. Insincerity and inconsistency are the mildest forms of his alleged political vices. He has offended the unforgiving, and served the ungrateful.

‘In imputing to him mediocrity, all have agreed. It is a comfortable doctrine, consolatory at once to their self-love and enmity. Perhaps he smiles at it, and settles himself in his seat of power. Mediocrity ! Does mediocrity raise itself to the highest station, in defiance of social obstacles,

leaving men of 'genius' dwarfed in the distance or toiling at the base? Does mediocrity grapple with rampant and powerful prejudices, subduing them to the rein and whip? Does it convert the servant into the master? In the mere art of making brilliant speeches, Sir Robert Peel may show mediocrity, when compared with a Lyndhurst, a Macaulay, or a Sheil. His tone may be too practical. An abstinent and pre-determined caution in the assertion of principles will always detract from mental power. When Sir Robert Peel does attempt to illustrate foregone conclusions by the flowers of rhetoric, he fails. Such practices, though adopted occasionally as a formal duty, are ungenial with the character of his mind, which rather exhibits itself in a course of action. He is to be studied in his whole career; not condemned upon personal peculiarities, defective oratory, or isolated instances of inconsistency. With statesmen results are the test of genius. If the world be not yet prepared to admit that Sir Robert Peel is a great man, at least they must allow that he has made for himself a great position.

His bearing in the House of Commons implies a consciousness that the power he wields is based on its opinion. He seems self-assured that he is of importance there. As he enters at the green door below the bar, and the members, of whatever party, instinctively make way for him, he looks at no one, recognises no one, receives salutation from no one. He seems neither to know nor to be known by any member present. He moves straight on, gliding slowly along the floor like something unreal, with steps half-sidling, on what O'Connell called his two left legs, as though he were preparing for the stately minuet. The broad, full frame—tending,

of late, to portliness, and looking still more full in the ample vest and long broad-skirted frock-coat—seems almost a weight to its supports : an apprehensive man might fear that the sidling step would weaken into a slight stagger. An air of formality and pre-occupation is on the face. The countenance, though handsome and of fine mould, looks broad, flat,—not open—and traitless. An habitual suppression of feeling has left it without marked features. A complacent gravity alternates with an austere coldness. Or, the brows are elevated with a haughtiness not natural to him ; and a strange contradictory smile, sometimes nearly humorous, sometimes almost self-contemning, plays with a slight convulsive motion, as though not quite under control. It seems to say : ‘ We are all going through a solemn farce, and I am the chief actor.’ Anon ; and a rigid, cold, self-absorbed, almost disdainful expression has seized on the face : the head (eyebrows still arched) cranes forward from the tight cravat, and moves twice or thrice with a convulsive twitch—as though a strong internal mastering effort had been made to preserve the grandiose demeanour proper in a man knowing himself the target of five hundred pairs of eyes. Arrived at his place, he exchanges no recognitions with his immediate colleagues, but sits apart,—his body prone upon his crossed legs, his hat down upon his ears, his face stretched forward in anxious attention or agitated with nervous twitches, while his right hand, the two fore-fingers forked, strokes slowly down the nose, or plays unconsciously with his seals, or the keys of his despatch-boxes, which lie before him on the speaker’s table.

‘ Sir Robert Peel, in his manly speech on quitting office in 1835—after a brief ministerial career, in

which he first evinced that self-reliance which has since proved his distinguishing trait as a statesman—said he wished ‘to stand well’ with the House of Commons. That he has taken pains to do so, shows his sense of the importance of popular approbation. Statesmen, he sees, must now rule through opinion, not, as before, through intrigue. He does rule; but as no man ever ruled yet in the Commons House of Parliament. His is not a moral influence, like that of Chatham, or of his gifted son, or Charles James Fox. He is not beloved, esteemed, followed with admiration. His power is solitary, self-created, self-emanating. Napoleon-like, he chose to place the crown on his own head. He is a creature of political isolation. He sees in the House an aggregate meeting of rival interests, always in a state of suppressed hostility on principles, or of open conflict on details. In their mutual jealousy, and consequent weakness, lies his power. He holds the balance. He rules them by their hopes, their fears, their interests; not by their affections or their confidence. But with what exquisite art he conceals his mode of managing them! Knowing that direct dictation would provoke resistance, or humiliating appeals to sordid motives afford a plea for virtuous indignation, how artfully he covers the whole with a varnish of public spirit! At the very moment when appealing the most earnestly to principles, do we find him the most sily addressing himself to interest. Every section, every opinion, and all their possible combinations, are mapped in his mind. Nothing that can win a cheer from any party is rejected. Their separate delight blinds them to the inconsistency of contrary propositions. Under pretence of stopping a gap

in the finances, he effected a change of principle from indirect to direct taxation. To reconcile the middle classes to an Income Tax, he let in foreign produce, and promised them cheap provisions. Turning at the same time round to the landed interest, he said: 'Never mind what I say to *them*: no produce to any amount will come in under the tariff.' In the end, he got increased revenue from both classes; and smiled at the short-sighted jealousies of those whom he had thus led to do what he believed to be the best for the country. By breaking up the land-marks of party, he does all the work of a coalition. Mark his paternal style and accent! You think he's everybody's friend—that he is straining to do his utmost for all. 'Only wait patiently, and trust to me,' he says. They suspect his sincerity, yet are led away by his speciousness. His voice, how bland, flexible, obedient to the faintest shades of expression! His tone and bearing, how candid, nay, innocent of all political guile! His demeanour, how inspiring, familiar! How dexterously he lets fall his crumbs of comfort to the manufacturers, or gives the country gentleman a hint that he will not be coerced! Half the secret of his influence, whether in or out of office, lies in the deliberate self-possession with which he distils his policy—proposing no measure or plan of action till time is ripe, till, by a mixture of conviction, cajolery, and threat, he is able to carry it by arraying one interest against another. Having gained his point, how soon he wraps himself again in his coldness and reserve, intimating haughtily that the measure was *his*, and that *he* carried it; and how readily the House—tools he has been adroitly preparing for the work during

many years—submit to be so served again ! They wait in dark fear on this man, so close and mysterious in preparing his plans, so pliable and painstaking in carrying them out. He has conquered party by party broken down the prejudices of men through their interests—lessened party spirit by narrowing its sphere of action. His own followers, whom he has lured or coerced into concession, or the opposite party, who had expected more, turn round after his measures are passed, and abuse him. He only smiles. It is too late. Sir Robert Peel never looks back. You might think he had forgotten there were ever such things as emancipation, anti-reform struggles, or old Toryism. Retrospection is no principle of his policy. He deals with the present, and makes the most of it. As to the morality of his system, less said the better. The political Furies are always at hand to claim their victim. But the good workman does his best with his tools. A Metternich carries vast schemes of policy by despotic power. A constitutional minister thinks through a representative assembly: his wisest plans may be wrecked by the meanest minds.

‘As a statesman, Sir Robert Peel seems to identify himself with the middle classes. He did not exactly give them power; but he seems prepared to extend it. Conscious of the humbleness of his origin, he often refers to it with an affected humility—it may be, with a manly pride. One might almost suspect him of a settled plan to exalt his order. Himself the son of a manufacturer, and deriving all his social consequence from commerce, it might have been expected that when he entered parliament it would have been as the advocate

of those principles which, whether from natural affinity or political accident, have always found favour with the commercial and trading classes. If that would have been his natural position, it follows that his championship of High Church and aristocratic principles was an anomaly. That an offshoot of the middle, almost of the plebeian, class should so soon eclipse all his patrician rivals in the struggle for political pre-eminence, might on the other hand be taken as a fact pregnant with ominous warning to the aristocracy, as significant of decay, and of the coming downfall of their exclusive ascendancy. Be that as it may, it is a remarkable fact, that no sooner has this representative of the active industry and busy intellect of the country obtained power from time to time, than he has used it to work out objects totally opposed to those of the men by whom it was intrusted to him. Witness emancipation; witness his free-trade measures, and liberal political declarations. The whole of his conduct since his return to power in 1840 has been an appeal, an ostentatious appeal, from the privileged classes to the country at large. The approbation of the middle classes he has proclaimed to be the fit reward of a wise statesman. To the middle classes he looks for support in his struggles against the classes of which he is the political, though not the social head. And who are those most likely to be benefited by his measures past and prospective? The middle classes. He is himself a sort of representative of those classes. Fancy might extend the likeness to dress and manners. His loose, long frock-coat, odd, cylindrical, small-rimmed hat, and buff or drab nether garments, while quite in keeping with the man, were

anything but in character with the garb of an aristocrat. His awkward and ungainly attitude as an equestrian does not bespeak blood or training.

‘Reluctantly followed by the aristocracy, he seems too deeply to know he is not one of the order. His manners affect the aristocratic, but fall short of the easy. His courtesy is constrained, his deference formal, his affability overdone. See him in full evening dress!—his tight, choking cravat, his coat unrecognised in Sartorian art, his black flesh-fitted nether garments tapering in shapeless diminution to the ankles! How stiff his ease! He bows where he should bend. He seems conscious that the senate, not the ball-room, is his proper sphere. His homage to royalty is the obeisance of all that is stilted and constrained.

‘If Sir Robert Peel stands alone, it is from choice. He can the better work out his views. He has known the fetters of party friendship, the virulence of its hatred. To isolate himself may be his revenge. This time he will not be called a traitor, yet have his own will. For this statesman, so abused, so charged with mediocrity, weakness, insincerity, has really a strong character and fixed purposes. Read his speech on moving the Emancipation Bill: refer to his short administration in 1834-5, when he rose to the height of moral greatness; read his noble answer to Cobbett’s brutal attack, and two or three declarations he made after resuming office in 1840: you will find proof enough that there is a strong undercurrent of deep feeling and moral energy. What a fresh academical relish there was on his address to the Glasgow students!

‘Whenever he can escape from the degrading necessities of his temporizing policy; when he can

speak, with modest pride, of himself, his origin, his purposes, his hopes; when the higher aim—historical renown—displaces for the hour the smaller but more immediate stake—temporary opinion and power—upon which the ultimate triumph unfortunately rests; then, as in the speeches just referred to, you see that there is fire smouldering beneath—that there is a moral elevation you did not suspect—that his aspirations tend to a kind of greatness, not at all compatible with the popular notions of his character. For his fixed purposes, look to his conduct on the currency question, and to those measures in connexion with the revenue and taxation of the country, and also with reference to Ireland, which have virtually changed the state of parties. He has his ambition too. An honourable fame—he has proudly declared it—is his hoped-for reward. A page in history more fascinates his imagination than the glitter of a coronet.

‘ Since 1840 his public life has been a series of progressive developments. He began by laying down the principle, that his duty to the public was superior to any obligations to his party. He recognised the nation as his only master. To the nation, in the aggregate, he is proudly humble; to all sections of it, humbly proud. He has been gradually making his peace with the people of England. He has used craft and dissimulation to cloak great designs: his disinterestedness must be the guarantee of his good faith. If he has been a traitor to his party, he has made amends to his sovereign and his country. After having trained the House of Commons, by every refinement of political and parliamentary art, to be the obedient slaves of his will, he has compelled the greatest men of his day—the greatest warrior and the most distinguished

lawyer of the age—to abandon their most cherished convictions, and to take from him the laws of their mind. Thus it is that he has individualized himself and consolidated his power. He can stand up in the face of parliament, and defy all the viler insinuations of party spirit,—the petty opprobrium heaped on inconsistency. The proof of his rectitude, of his possession of that wisdom and that higher morality which supersede the minor and temporary obligation of consistency, lies in the necessity his countrymen are under of adopting his policy ; and of calling on him alone, of all his contemporaries, to carry it out. He is able to stand up in his place in parliament, and declare that he desires not to be minister—that he even prays to be relieved from office. But the country calls loudly on him to remain. He may be hated, despised, undervalued ; but he is wanted. For near a century, no minister has held so proudly independent a position. Abroad, a policy of manly conciliation ; at home, an easy victory over party obstructions to the attainment of the public good ; an united government and a prosperous people ; attest the ascendancy of his powerful and well-regulated mind.

‘Party politics ought not to prevent a just estimate of personal character. Sir Robert Peel has been singularly unfortunate in the opinions held of him. He is certainly the man of his age. Posterity alone will judge how far the events of the time and the state of parties have necessitated his temporizing course, or how far they have themselves been produced by his cautious spirit. An able man he now is : a great man he never can become till finally released from political restrictions ; yet much of his claim to greatness will rest on the manner in which he has worked out his will in spite of those restrictions.’

XI.

THE second administration of Sir Robert Peel will always be memorable as having inaugurated a new commercial and financial system for the British empire, and as having pointed the way to the most effectual mode of conciliating the Irish Catholics. He commenced, but was not spared to complete, the former measure; but he sealed the fate of the old commercial system when he repealed the corn laws. The character of his mind was eminently displayed in the means to which he resorted in order to attain that object. Some continue to assert that he was forced into this step by Richard Cobden, as he had been compelled to grant Catholic emancipation by O'Connell. Cobden, perhaps, would be the last to lay claim to such an honour, although it was so generously conceded to him by the deceased statesman; because it is notorious that the leaders of the League had not expected so ample and final a concession as that which was accorded to them by the Conservative chief. It is difficult to say which were the most astonished at the suddenness and scope of that resolve—the Tory landed aristocracy, or the manufacturing magnates. But Sir Robert Peel had, in the instance of Catholic Emancipation and the currency, shown that what he did he would do with all his strength; and it was in this spirit that he resolved on utterly abandoning the tax on corn, rather than effect any compromise. His motives would appear to have been pre-eminently those of a statesman. His sagacity taught him that there might, sooner or later, be expected another upheaving of the democratic fire on the Continent; and

experience proved that such movements always meet a response here at home, in which the aristocracy are losers of power or *prestige*. Concurrently came the sad intelligence that a failure might be anticipated in the staple food of the Irish people. In face of his strong parliamentary majority was the Anti-Corn-Law League, menacing not merely a fierce agitation against the aristocracy, but also a new mode of creating fictitious votes in counties, which would still more effectually sap the foundations on which power had hitherto rested. Since 1834, Sir Robert Peel had learned to think for himself, and to command; during this his second administration, he had been so popular and so powerful, that he almost felt himself to be what he appeared to all others—the dictator of the empire. It was then that he resolved to avail himself of those concurrent inducements, and to anticipate, by a bold initiative, an inevitable concession. An anecdote, preserved by M. John Lemoinne, of the *Journal des Débats* (a gentleman who, to great journalistic power, adds a singularly complete knowledge of English politics), stamps with authority this view of Sir Robert Peel's motives:—‘The venerable Hume,’ writes M. Lemoinne, ‘the senior of the House of Commons, relates that the news of the French revolution of February reached the House during a sitting. He seated himself near Sir Robert Peel, no longer minister; and, talking of the events at Paris, Sir Robert observed, ‘This comes from the attempt to govern with a numerical majority in a legislative assembly without consulting the public voice,’ and pointing to the Protectionist benches—a party who had punished his courage and perception by ostracism—he added, ‘and yet that is what they wished me to do, but I

was firm in refusing.' He was firm, and saved his country from that violent crisis which a few years later upset Europe. He had scented the revolution, and it has been universally acknowledged since that England passed tranquilly through the year 1848, solely because it had complied with the popular wants of commercial reform.'

This great act accomplished, Sir Robert Peel felt that his mission was ended ; although he was, perhaps, during three subsequent years, the only man in the empire who did not contemplate, as a matter of course, his restoration to office with absolute liberty of action. It is not here necessary to enter in detail into the active causes of the downfall of Sir Robert Peel ; the long-growing discontent of the landed aristocracy, the sarcastic attacks of Mr. Disraeli, the impatience natural to the people of a free country when any one man has for a long time exercised absolute sway. Sir Robert Peel, with the same foresight and firmness that led to his offence, also prepared his atonement. He did not wait to be manœuvred out of office. He wished to retire with dignity, yet on some question whereon defeat would not imply disgrace. The Coercion Act supplied the opportunity ; the ambition of the Whigs being furthered by the greedy revenge of the estranged Tories, oblivious of their treason to the cause of social order. In his retiring speech, Sir Robert Peel concentrated all the dignity of his latter years. If all men felt that in a political sense retribution was just, on the other hand his retirement was regarded as only temporary, rather as a sacrifice to the decencies than a punishment—a suspension from his dictatorial functions, rather than a final dismissal. The moral feeling of the nation was on his side, and, in respect for his services and

sacrifices, they overlooked a something very much like arrogance in his parting words, as well as one essential fault in his summary of his own deserts, when he claimed credit for having cheapened the food of the people. As part of a great fiscal change, this was a great gain; but in exempting a large mass of persons from taxation, and holding cheapness and freedom from fiscal burthens out as a boon for others, he was in fact creating a pauper class—purchasing the safety of the aristocracy by pecuniary sacrifices, and destroying the strongest right and inducement to the poorer classes to share in the weight of state affairs.

Out of office, Sir Robert Peel exercised a moral influence on the political world scarcely inferior to that he had wielded as a minister. Feeling that the Whigs had sown what he had reaped, he supported them as a duty, and not merely that they might carry out his policy. His last speech before the melancholy accident which terminated his career, was the sole exception to this policy: it resolved itself into an earnest but unwilling protest against the foreign policy of Lord Palmerston; and it gives occasion for the observation, that Sir Robert Peel's opinions on foreign policy, though rarely expressed, were consistently in favour of non-intervention.

XII.

THE following notice of the oratory and parliamentary demeanour of Sir Robert Peel is reprinted from former publications of the present writer:—

‘ Criticisms on Sir Robert Peel's oratory, by

comparison with high standards, would be unfair. He has too much to accomplish by his speeches, to be able to make them perfect models. He cannot devote time to the pruning and polishing of his language as can Brougham or Sheil, professed orators. More formal than Brougham, he also wants his intellectual energy: less imaginative than Sheil, he achieves his conquests by appealing to the reason and not to the passions. His speeches would lose in effect what they gained in beauty. They are usually plain, and though occasionally on stilts, unambitious. He deals with opinions as Wellington did with troops—never advances any unfit for service. They stand their ground. He carries utilitarianism into oratory, looking more to present effect than future praise. Like all clever advocates, he reiterates his views, the better to impress them. This spoils the symmetry of his speeches. His style is correct, not elegant; elaborate, but not graceful. With great fluency of words he has little power over language. His sentences are long, often involved. He is verbose to a fault. You seldom meet with anything terse, pointed, or profound. Anti-climax is a common sin with him. He abounds in facts, and is such a master in argument (or what passes for such) that he can take up any side with equal effect. But his arguments are shallow in proportion to their ingenuity. They are raw recruits, enlisted at the moment; their defects are forgotten in the glory of victory. They have an affinity with the prejudices of the hearers; and hold good only as long as the connexion lasts. They are valuable not in themselves, but in what they effect. They are a crowd of witnesses to that effect. He who uses them has for those who are led

by them. Each is an additional reason why he stands alone and has no friend.

‘His action is out of all rule. It is too stilted, or too familiar. Acting a part, of course he sometimes overdoes it. The worst feature of his style is a studied affectation. He opens a great speech—as, for instance, in introducing the income-tax, or his currency plans—with a pompous pretension, an exaggerated solemnity, a half inaudible tone of breathless importance, that is itself almost a burlesque. At other times he condescends to an unworthy levity. Though he but seldom perpetrates jokes, he usually chokes them in the utterance, by chuckling over them beforehand. There is great redundancy in his action. In the perpetual mobility of his person—now turning quite round to his supporters, and now leaning forward on the clerks’ desk to speak to those opposite—you often lose the meaning of his words. His pet attitude, however, seems to be, to cross one leg over the other, and put one arm under the tails of his coat, while the elbow of the other rests upon the table—a very pleasant chatty way, but not quite in keeping with high oratory. Yet, if Sir Robert had spent time in conning perorations, rehearsing enthusiasm, inventing impromptus, or studying graceful action in the artificial school, he would have missed acquiring the higher art of ruling men. The fame of a first-rate orator would never have satisfied Sir Robert Peel’s ambition, even if he could have attained it. He has played for a higher stake. He has solid power. His name is a talis-

His mind has made itself felt among controversies. Whatever his faults, he has elevated the House of Commons, by giving it a new life and vigour to its constitutional claims.

In his respect of its decisions and observances he is almost puritanical. * * * *

‘If posterity should decide to rank Sir Robert Peel among great men, he will rather be classed among the statesmen than among the orators.’ He may be talked of with Walpole, but not with Pitt or Fox. Oratory is a severe and exacting art. Its object is not merely to excite the passions or sway the judgment, but also to produce models for the delight or admiration of mankind. It is a study which will not brook a divided attention. The orator speaks rarely—at long intervals—during which he saturates his mind with his subject, while casting it in the mould to which his taste guides him, as being the most calculated to enhance by its charm the intrinsic worth or beauty of his thoughts. Like the poet, he works either from love of his theme, or in the anticipation of triumph. But the exigencies of modern political warfare have called into being a class of public speakers, whose effusions fall as far short of those of the professional orator in permanent beauty, as they excel them in immediate utility. As the character of the House of Commons, remodelled under the Reform Bill, has become more business-like, so the most popular and powerful speakers there are those who, rejecting the beautiful, apply themselves to the practical. Eloquence has become a positive element of power. A party leader is compelled to enter with almost equal energy into the most trifling as into the most important affairs. He must be always ready with facts, with arguments, with simulated enthusiasm. He must identify himself with all the interests of those whom he could lead. Even in the most crowded arena there is no scope for his display.

‘ At the head of this class of public speakers—of those who either do not aim at, or fall short of, acquiring the divine art which, harmonizing language till it becomes a music, and shaping thought into a talisman, gives a man the right to be called an orator—stands forth conspicuously Sir Robert Peel. We have already said that he sacrifices much possible fame as an orator, in order to secure substantial influence as a statesman. Some may be prepared to combat this ; to say that Sir Robert Peel’s inherent mediocrity is such that he could not, if he would, have rivalled even the most distinguished of living orators, much less the mighty dead. But it is difficult to suppose that a man of such high and such varied attainments, one in whom the scholastic fervour has survived amidst the uncongenial pursuits of a stormy political life—one who, as for instance in his speech at Glasgow, and in some few of his speeches in Parliament, or at public places, has breathed the purer atmosphere of poetry and philosophy—it is scarcely possible to believe that, had he early devoted himself to the study and imitation of the greatest models, to the perfection of style, to the discriminating choice of language, he could not have elevated himself as an orator of the highest rank. No, Sir Robert Peel’s aim is different ; his political weight depends on his power of charming or influencing the House of Commons. He has studied political opinion until even its minutest shades are made palpable to him. They are all more or less represented in the popular assembly, and there he displays his knowledge of all their wants, and avails himself, in fulfilling his purpose, of all their rivalries and animosities. He not only but finds, from time to time, the sources of Sir R. Peel. His caution,

and, at the same time, his determination, are so well known, that the slightest hint he lets fall as to his purposes is instantly caught up. One cause of the breathless attention with which he is heard, is, that each section of the House is anxious to penetrate the mystery of his future policy, knowing well that he will not utter any direct promise as a mere flourish, or unless he means to fulfil it. If he be oracular in his mystery, he is often equally so in his studied mystification. As no man can more clearly explain himself when he pleases, so no man can more adroitly wrap up his real meaning in an unintelligible involvement of words. Look at him while in power from 1841 to 1846, while still he was concealing his intentions with respect to the commercial policy of the country. Sometimes a sturdy Radical, or an indignant agriculturist, determines to catch the eel by the tail and electrify him. He puts some plain direct question, and demands an answer. You think Sir Robert must now be fairly posed—his veil must be rent—parties must soon resume their own habits—for he must say something positive on which a war-cry can be raised. He rises, leans forward on the table, playing with his glasses, or puts his hands under the tails of his blue frock-coat, and in the most open and candid way declares his determination to answer frankly the question which has been put to him. This is satisfactory—it propitiates. All are on the *qui vive*. There is hushed silence. All heads are stretched forward in expectation of the announcement of policy. Perhaps Lord John Russell and Lord Palmerston exchange a glance or smile of incredulity, for they know their man. Meanwhile, the soft, bland voice has poured itself forth—its faintest tones heard in the most remote

corner. The bearing bespeaks a full consciousness of the responsibility of the duty of the moment; the face wears the placid expression of innocence. You are fairly prepossessed for such a man. But what is he saying? By that cheer from Mr. Cobden and his Sancho, Mr. Bright, he appears to have said something pleasant to the manufacturers. But that roar of delight from the other side? Oh, he has convulsed the country gentlemen by some well-timed compliment to agriculture, not as yet the object of his ridicule. And now another cheer, more general, is the reward of some pompous maxim of the public good. It is clear the House has warmed to him. The more kindly they entertain, the more candid grows the speaker's tones, the more earnest is he to do the best which the state of things allows. An elaborate statement follows of the different courses open to him, of their several advantages and disadvantages, in all of which he adroitly rouses the prejudices slumbering for the moment around him, and establishes a sympathy with each, centering hopes in himself, and setting old hatreds anew against each other, until, having thus led the various parties into a mental *mêlée*, he winds up with an 'upon the whole' leading with pompous affectation of resolves to a declaration of what he means to do, which, in fact, comprises—in an artful woof of phrases, sounding, but bodiless—almost everything that he does not mean to do. Meanwhile, he has skilfully diverted the attention of all from the real point at issue to their mutual jealousies and asperities. Ten to one he sits down 'amidst loud cheers,' having uttered much, but avowed nothing. It may be asked, 'How can such a body be so transparently cajoled?' The answer is, 'It is done—done every day, in almost

every speech ; and the more it is done the more they seem to like it.'

'This, however, is but one phase of Sir Robert's parliamentary character. There are two occasions—and they have multiplied during the last year or two—when he boldly throws aside all these arts of *finesse*, and assumes a much more lofty position. Patient, painstaking, a dissembler, even—politically speaking—a hypocrite, in order to obtain power, he no sooner felt the sceptre firm in his grasp than his mind seemed to expand ; he grew in moral stature ; he disdained to look back at the tortuous path by which he had ascended, but pressed with proud confidence forward. A magical change came over Sir Robert Peel from the hour that he finally resolved to make the attempt to obtain a pure majority of the House of Commons, without the aid of the agricultural members—to be the minister, not of a party, but of the nation. Whether it was that the desperate nature of the game, and the magnitude of the stake (nothing less than the fealty of a party, and the reputation of a life), inspired an unwonted magnanimity, or that, a long-sought opportunity having arrived for throwing off a mask of hateful subserviency, Sir Robert Peel now for the first time displayed his real character ; assuredly there was in his speeches during the last two years, and especially the last six months of his official life, a tone to which his contemporaries were wholly unaccustomed. With a sense of power, and a consciousness of self-sacrifice, he assumed the air, now of a dictator, now of a martyr. Defiance to the agriculturists, and threats to the legitimate opposition, were backed by a kind of covert appeal to the public out of doors : occasional flashes of spirit, rare but emphatic and

decisive instances of plain speaking, induced a momentary doubt whether this man, so metamorphosed by a great peril and an unparalleled responsibility, could hardly be the same Sir Robert Peel whose name had long been a bye-word for plausibility and slipperiness in statesmanship, whom you had so often seen shivering with ludicrous indecision on the very brink of a positive declaration. But it is a singular fact, illustrating the real character of Sir Robert Peel, that at every great crisis of his public life; on bringing in the Emancipation Bill; on assuming office in 1834; and finally, on introducing the measure for repeal of the Corn-law, he has thus flung aside his disguise, and has spoken out plainly and boldly his real mind, regardless of personal consequences. This may have been magnanimity—it may have been moral hardihood: political passions will always usurp in such cases the decision of a calm judgment.

XIII.

IN his private and social capacity, Sir Robert Peel embodied the qualities which Englishmen most respect and love. A pure and exalted morality reigned supreme over all his conduct, seemingly over all his thoughts. It was the morality, not of convention, but of conviction. It had interfused his whole being from the earliest age; inspired by the example and precept of his father, and fortified by constant contemplation of its ennobling influence on the human character, as exemplified in the lives of illustrious men. Justice, honesty, benevolence, were the great rules of conduct he inculcated on his contemporaries: the task

of so doing cost him no labour, because such sentiments were the fountains of his own mental and moral being. Reserved, seemingly cold even to austerity, in public, in his private relations he was the most kind, frank, and amiable of men, treating those who came in contact with him (without the right to equality of position) with a genial courtesy, that did not insult by affability and condescension. He was reserved only till he knew with what 'manner of man' he had to deal: once satisfied by observation on this head, all constraint vanished, and with it all sense on the part of his visitor that a long public career of honour and fame had created a difference of condition.

In his domestic relations, Sir Robert Peel was the model of an English gentleman; a tender husband; a fond, yet judicious parent; as a landlord and an employer, commanding the love and respect of all who depended on him. He was not much given to convivial intercourse; but when he did unbend, he gave the rein to his humour, and was the merriest of the merry. The writer enjoyed some opportunities of personally observing Sir Robert Peel, and was always strongly impressed by the readiness with which he could disembarrass his mind of the overwhelming weight of public affairs, entering into new subjects foreign to his ordinary occupations with a youthful freshness and avidity. Not less remarkable than his readiness was his willingness thus to busy his mind with such topics. A certain dignity of manner repelled intrusiveness; so that if you were invited to converse, you felt assured that there existed some stronger motive than mere conventional courtesy. In fact, Sir Robert Peel was always gathering information,—it mattered not to him on what subjects, provided the

medium was to be relied on. In the course of several long interviews with him, under circumstances permitting much freedom of speech, the writer especially noticed the avidity with which Sir Robert Peel sought for facts, and the precision with which the relative or ultimate value of those facts was concentrated, as the conversation proceeded, in aphoristic sentences, which again were brought to bear upon subsequent subjects with an algebraic simplicity.

From such small indications of the working of this remarkable man's mind, it was easy to calculate the processes by which he had amassed so vast a store of knowledge. Not that the writer had the slightest pretension to be able to add in any material way to that store, but that being relieved from the fear of occupying intrusively such valuable time and being invited to converse, he spoke freely, and at the same time observed the effect of his statements or remarks on his auditor. Sir Robert Peel perfected every process of thought as he went on. If he could not digest or assimilate a new fact, he did not permit it to remain in a crude state, disturbing his conclusions, but reserved it till he could associate it with others. Although the character of his mind was intensely practical, it was not the vulgar practicality of a small soul, but was ennobled and elevated by liberality of sentiment ; as Nature is minute and precise in trifles, nor disdains the meanest agencies ; because on the atoms depend the harmony and beauty of the whole creation.

Sir Robert Peel was a steady patron of literature and the arts. Trading writers he despised, nor would he profit by their services or reward them ; but men of genius or of industry, and journalists

who were duly impressed with the moral responsibilities of their profession, received from him all that they ever desired—courteous respect, and a treatment consonant with their claims. The limited sum allowed by the niggardly commercial spirit of the English Commons for the aid of literary and scientific men, was apportioned by Sir Robert Peel with justice and discrimination. Southey, James Montgomery, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Fraser Tytler, poor Hood's widow, M'Culloch, Mrs. Somerville, Dr. Faraday, these were among those whom he selected as the recipients of the queen's scant funds ; and for others he found government situations. His private generosity was also great ; but in this respect he of course did little more than do most distinguished men who are possessed of large fortunes.

As a patron of the arts, Sir Robert Peel is on all hands admitted to have been liberal, and disposed to encourage genius ; although there will always be differences of opinion on the question of taste. The collection of paintings in Privy Gardens at least attested a thorough knowledge of the good in the Dutch and Flemish schools ; while that at Drayton was rich also in modern art. The writer remembers with pleasure having been conducted by Sir Robert Peel personally and alone through those galleries, when he had the best means of knowing that in respect of art he had at least a reason for the faith that was in him ; for his critical remarks indicated that thorough appreciation of the beauties of the several works and schools of art which can never be acquired by the mere purchasing and patronizing millionaire.

XIV.

SIR Robert Peel was not so much a moral and political phenomenon, as a necessity. In any age his talents would have commanded political power, but his distinctive character would have escaped attention, except at a peculiar crisis, such as that through which he was the means of conducting his country. Even as it was, had his mind been naturally of a stronger and more independent order, had his pride of judgment or his will predominated over his inquisitive and acquisitive faculties, had his capacity for receiving impressions from others been less marked than it was, the age would still have wanted the man whom happily it found. When he entered public life, the country had been little more than a century in the enjoyment of a recognised constitutional system. For many years before, public men, even of rank and influence, had begun to perceive, or at all events to teach the people, that this system was deceptive—that the representative element was too confined in its action. Not many years before, the Duke of Richmond and several of the leaders of the Whig party had actually propounded, in parliament and elsewhere, the right of the people to a representation almost, if not quite as democratic, as that at which the House of Commons has since derisively laughed when proposed by Mr. Feargus O'Connor as the People's Charter. The younger Pitt, as has already been observed, was arrested in his attempts at a liberal policy, only by the necessity of concentrating the energies of the national mind on one sole and vital object. During the earlier part of Sir Robert Peel's more youthful career, an agitation was car-

ried on for Catholic emancipation, for parliamentary reform, for what was called civil and religious liberty, quite as systematic as those which, in more recent years, have changed the political aspect of the country, the only difference being that such agitation was more confined to the parliamentary arena. The least prescient of political observers must have seen that, sooner or later, when the force derived by the government from resistance to Buonaparte had expended itself, these questions must occupy the public mind. Trading politicians saw this inevitable consequence; and it would be fair to suppose that the same conclusion forced itself upon a young and inquiring mind like that of Sir Robert Peel. Because he became so early and continued so long a member of a Tory government, the heated political passions of that day ascribed to him all the bigotry and prejudice presumed to be the indiscriminate characteristic of members of the Tory party. This was a fatality attending the late Sir Robert Peel throughout his political life. It coloured unconsciously the opinions of even the most unprejudiced observers of his career. Because, by his talents and eloquence, he was always one of the foremost, and latterly the foremost man of his party, he was saddled with all the follies and extravagancies generated in the wide scope of an extensive political association; and this adverse influence pursued him even many years after he had boldly flung off such burdens, and impressed the peculiar characteristics of his mind upon the chiefs of the Tories and no small portion of their followers. Every young man who joins a great party, under however favourable auspices, must, to a certain extent, merge his own opinions, if then he has any, in the general policy

of his superiors; any moral evil implied by such conduct is fairly counterbalanced by united action and obedience to men whose position implies superior wisdom and knowledge of affairs. While in early life Sir Robert Peel continued a subordinate, and, so to speak, a servant of party, he spoke in that capacity strongly enough on party questions; but, if internal evidence may be believed, he never descended to be the mere partisan. You will search in vain in any of his early speeches for the habit of dogmatizing, the political and religious bigotry, and the contempt for public opinion, which were ascribed to his associates. Even in party speeches, made as a member of the government, inquiry and analysis, and a permanent habit of balancing facts and arguments, may be found. It has been rightly said, that his mind was always in a course of development. When fettered by official restraints in early life, he always spoke with an evident impartiality on questions not involving duty to his party. If he avoided committing himself, even at this time, to positive declarations and opinions, his caution might as plausibly be ascribed to a doubt of his own judgment and a reverence for truth as to mere calculation. This supposition derives confirmation from his perseverance in the same habit, when, having risen from the subordinate to the master, he took up grander ideas and expounded more important principles, indulging freely this spirit of impartiality on great political questions. If this arose in part from the greater freedom he enjoyed, surely it may also be ascribed in some measure to the development of his early spirit of impartiality. In acts he violently oscillated; in mind, never. If his party swayed to and fro, needs must that he went with them; but in time the

gravity of his own temperament reacted on his party and moderated their force.

Moderation and a becoming modesty marked his opinions from the first. This, it is charitable to suppose, may have arisen from a natural diffidence in a young man forced so early into public life. It seems to have arisen, not from weakness or fear of grappling with difficulties, but from a spirit of inquiry and investigation which settled into a habit. Later in life it was adopted from a conviction that it was the primary necessity in the education of a people who were rapidly advancing towards a practical democracy. Among many services Sir Robert Peel rendered to his countrymen, not the least was his having infused into them this leading characteristic of his own mind. It had become the more necessary, after a long period of violent political conflict, in which the passions, so often mistaken for political principles, had grown to such rank luxuriance. As, during many years, an opinion was sedulously inculcated on the public, to the effect that Sir Robert Peel had been all along the violent and obstinate opponent of reform, except when he became its equally decided supporter, those who desire to form a true estimate of the man will do well to refer to the acknowledged records, and satisfy themselves as to what his opinions really were. Many popular fallacies and errors will be removed by this very simple process.

In estimating Sir Robert Peel's character, this habitual, almost constitutional, moderation has been overlooked, even by the few who were not carried away by political passions, but felt the true responsibility of judgment. Sir Robert Peel, having entered life and assumed official responsibility at so early an age, became of necessity an observer

and a student. This character attached to his mind, even to the latest hour of his life. Had he been himself a slave of passion or prejudice, he could not have emancipated others from those fetters. He was always learning new lessons in statesmanship. He applied the inductive method alike to great things and to the insignificant. Facts were his authorities; facts the only persuasive influence on his mind. First he had gradually to wean himself from the mental ties engendered by paternal precept and example, and by early party associations. That must have been a long and a difficult task, living, as he did, in such an atmosphere, and with the exigent realities of his official duty daily and hourly calling upon him to offer sacrifice to systems of government which he was already beginning to doubt. This opinion of the early condition of his mind is not a theory suggested by his later conduct, or a friendly regard for his reputation; it is founded on the evidence contained in his speeches. No other official person, even no other subordinate of party at that period—more especially of the party self-arrogating liberalism—spoke or acted with more moderation, with more respect for justice, with a more significant desire to conciliate public opinion, than did this young statesman. His inconsistency loses much of its mark, is less abrupt in its transitions, the more microscopically we examine his opinions. His early youth was spent under circumstances unfavourable to the reputation of such a mind. Party feeling ran high on both sides. You were required to take your opinions, as the French electors take their candidates, by lists. However little you might relish A or B of those opinions, you must swallow it, or seem to do so, on pain of being cast

out as not thorough. A very young man, trained up in reverence for the old, constitutionally mistrusting the new, and, more than all, diffident of his own powers, might, naturally enough, have fallen into venial errors. It was evidence of a fine mental and moral organization that Sir Robert Peel came out of the trial so little tainted with misprision of treason to truth. Amid the turmoil of political strife, he arrived, by a mysterious process of growth, at the same results as if he had been a philosopher in his closet. It has been remarked that Sir Robert Peel himself prepared and disciplined his army of facts, as the Duke of Wellington looked after the details of his troops. This is true. Sir Robert Peel was recruiting from his earliest official life. The test of common sense and practicability was his standard of measurement, and no new experience was permanently added to the number if it did not come up to the mark. Sir Robert Peel, even as a youth, seems to have anticipated the practical wisdom taught by age and experience. He seems to have early discovered, that in this world a man who is not a mere slave must have two characters, and live two lives—one for the world, the other for the inner self. Upon no other hypothesis can the unquestioned integrity of Sir Robert Peel be reconciled with the imputations cast upon his public character. The difference between him and some others was, that he falsified the humorous dictum of Luther, that the human mind is like a drunken man on horseback, who, if you prop him up on one side, falls over on the other. Sir Robert Peel, even in his youth, never fell over on the other side. Never, either from false impressions, or to propitiate party, did he rush into extremes. He held his own, self

sustained, with a clear spirit and a calm mind. 'He was inconsistent;' 'He changed his opinions;' 'He flung over his party;' and so forth. These are the stereotyped charges. Say, rather, that he held his judicial faculty as a sacred trust; that conviction was with him, as with every wise and honourable man, a slow process; that he desired to arrive at political truth; by which, in a free country, is to be understood, not theory alone, logically sustained, but that which is at once true and practicable. Till that union between the theory and the *modus operandi* is obtained—till, in short, public opinion marches more or less with private judgment—political truth has not become fit for legislative purposes. Sir Robert Peel saw this, as many others did; but the difference between him and them was, that he saw the opportune moment and seized it. His own conviction usually lagged behind the logical development of new truths; but it was always a little in advance of their general acceptance by the people. This it was that made him so valuable as a moderator, or, if the term be not too ignoble, the political go-between.

His mind marched with that of the public. The Liberals, in their avowed principles, were as much in advance of the average opinion of the nation as the Tories were in arrear. Sir Robert Peel's development kept pace with the development of national necessities. A policy of unqualified and obstinate resistance had generated a blind political antagonism, and a habit of reckless assault. Forces, rather than reason, were engaged in the struggle. At the era of the emancipation, the moral influence of public opinion, in its calmness and dignity, was not enough appreciated. Sir Robert Peel avowedly yielded the Catholic claims, not to conviction, but

to necessity. He had all along opposed the Catholics, not as religionists, but as intractable subjects, who acknowledged a foreign allegiance, which made it difficult to govern them. One might even suppose that Sir Robert Peel contemplated the possibility of a crisis such as the present day witnesses, where a measure of education in Ireland, of a healing and invigorating character, is threatened with frustration, because a foreign potentate forbids the Catholic clergy to assist it. But, in those days, it was a novelty for a statesman to arrive at, or at least to avow, a conviction at all, even of a necessity. The religion of party exacted a blind faith in fixed ideas, principles, and dogmas. To march with the people with averted eye and unwilling step, was then the only possible form of concession. It was Sir Robert Peel's merit to have foreseen this new path, and to have walked in it. But the change was not wholly abrupt. In the outcry raised on emancipation, his conduct on the Test Acts was forgotten. Yet what did he do? Although the minister of a government avowedly based on high-church principles, he refused to run counter to the House of Commons when that body, by a large majority, had affirmed the principle that the Test Acts should be repealed. To emphasize the principle thus adopted, he himself introduced a measure affirming the policy which he had opposed. What was this but an antetype of what he was to do on other and more vital occasions, when the advancing tide of public opinion threatened to break down the fixed ideas of ages? From the temperate tone of his opposition to the measure, his choice of any ground rather than that of absolute exclusion *de jure*, it was even then perceived that the time was not far distant when

the silent process of conviction would become fused with the administrative duty. Superficially, the inconsistency was as great as that which shortly followed on the Roman-catholic claims; but, analyzed, it no longer presented any moral deformity. Inconsistency with Sir Robert Peel was always accompanied by self-sacrifice,—the atonement was concurrent with the fault. When the next great crisis came, at the reform era, the sagacity of Sir Robert Peel, guided by his constitutional moderation, detected the error of the Whigs in stimulating, for party purposes, democracy in its unreasoning and dictatorial shape. He opposed, not so much the principle, as the measure of reform; and, when that opposition had proved unavailing, he taught his party, not merely to yield to a necessity, but also to adopt a policy. He became a Reformer, to the extent of the practicable. Adroit tactics, it is true, may be ascribed as the cause of this change; but an impartial observation of Sir Robert Peel's whole career suggests the probability that it was conviction. On the former occasion, necessity had impelled; now, conviction worked. Sir Robert Peel from this time forward rose above party, and therefore guided it all the more easily. His campaign as leader of the Conservative opposition, displayed his mastery over parliamentary tactics, but not more than it did his resolve never again to become the slave of dictated opinions. His then speeches and conduct are a study. Not only free from dissimulation, he still contrived to centre the will and opinions of his party in himself. An egoist only because he prominently used an accepted parliamentary form, he might have been much more egoistical, and yet have been safe from ridicule. But during the

whole of this brilliant part of his career he was gradually and carefully infusing into the general mind of his party that respect for the opinions and wishes of the nation as a whole, which had grown to be the rule of his own mind. It was because, by contrast, the Tories had grown more liberal than even the Whigs themselves, that they were slowly but surely advancing to power.

Moral courage was one of the great characteristics of the deceased statesman. You may call it ambition, but you must, at least, admit that its farseeing faith in the justice of mankind raised it to a high intellectual and moral rank. The brief administration of 1834-35 first disclosed the true proportions of Sir Robert Peel's character. He had taught his party lessons in adversity,—he now sought to let the public know that a change had come over the Tory policy. That is the key to this otherwise Quixotic attempt of one man to withstand a majority of the House of Commons. He never meant to run counter to the House of Commons; all he desired was an opportunity to fix indelibly on the national mind the sense that the conservators of the constitution would also be the Reformers of its abuses. What grandeur there was in his position at that time! 'Metamorphosed by a great peril and an unparalleled responsibility,' how gigantic grew the proportions of his character! There was a double daring. He was assuming the *onus* of a total change in the policy of his party, while at the same time seizing the victory from his opponents. Moderation had led to conviction, conviction placed him in accord with public opinion. At each fall he rose from the earth more strong than ever.

It was, however, in his last administration that

he showed himself a really great man. Emancipation and reform had been forced on the legislature by democratic violence. The agitators for corn-law repeal had seized on some 'cries' which threatened a repetition of the evil. A new development of Sir Robert Peel's character now startled the public. He had yielded to necessity, and then to conviction. He had grown to sympathize with public opinion,—he now aspired to guide it. He now betrayed the true foresight of the statesman. Cobden threatened to grow from a demagogue into a dictator. England could not afford an O'Connell. The integrity of the representation was threatened on the one hand; there was the awful shadow of advancing famine on the other. Still the hour of absolute necessity had not arrived. Sir Robert Peel chose to anticipate it by an act of grace.

The influence wielded by Sir Robert Peel over his contemporaries, and transmitted to his survivors, was not confined to his having been the emancipator of the Catholics from the dominion of bigotry; of the Tory party from the thralldom of political dogma and prejudice; or of the country at large from the repressing and contracting influence of the protective system. Nor, useful as have been his various practical reforms, and his improvements in the details of official administration, above all, important as was the change which he commenced in our system of taxation, were these his only claims. The action of his character embraced a wider range, and the results of upwards of forty years of public activity exhibit themselves in permanent traits imprinted on the national mind. In his address, already quoted, on being inaugurated Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow, we

have the key to Sir Robert Peel's character. Here we have explained the futility of that charge of mediocrity so impertinently flung at Sir Robert Peel during the greater part of his life—in fact, until his grand self-assertion during his first brief Premiership. Sir Robert Peel put aside, we believe for ever, the antecedent school of flashy orators and romantic statesmen. If he formed his character on any model, it was that of Sir Robert Walpole. But we incline to think he rather trusted to the instincts and impulses of his own nature, which was, in all respects, pre-eminently practical. He was the incarnation of common sense. His mind was, from first to last, imbibing information, and pondering, not so much on abstract principles, as on practicabilities. He taught the House of Commons that habits of business were of more value than *ad-captandum* qualities in a legislator. He had taught this to his older contemporaries, by his assiduous and persevering example. He impressed it on the young men growing up around him, alike by a continued example, and by the moral weight of his precepts. Not the least of his sources of glory is that he should have trained up a band of young statesmen, all imbued with his general opinion of the true action of the British Constitution, and educated for practical statesmanship with a perfection which leaves them without rivals either in this country or elsewhere. His memory will live, not in his public acts alone, but by the spirit of moderation, and the love of safe and steady progress, which he instilled into the national character. He taught, from the highest position which a subject can occupy in the civilized world, lessons never to be forgotten by mankind; lessons of duty to the governing power, of obedience to the written law,

and of respect for that public opinion out of which new laws spring. He taught, also, the duty of public faith—faith as regards the pecuniary engagements of the country, the rights and privileges of established institutions, and of international engagements with foreign countries. His public errors, his sudden changes of policy, might be chargeable on the necessities of party combination. Whenever he sacrificed party ties, he also imperilled his own power, his well-earned reputation, and his private friendships. As soon as, from circumstances, he became almost the dictator of his country, the blemishes of his past career were obliterated in the effulgence of his intellectual power and his moral dignity. When he was a free agent, all his thoughts and all his actions were devoted to the welfare of the nation at large. Unlike many statesmen of more brilliant and captivating qualities, his worth is not only appreciated immediately, but it promises to be held in still higher esteem as the lapse of time, and the effects of his policy, shall more and more diminish contemporary animosities. If, as in the opinion of many, the tendency of his policy has been to give a stimulus to democratic influences, and to offer a premium to agitation, it should be remembered that such a part as he has played is not likely ever to be played again—because such a period of transition can scarcely again occur.

Fifteen or sixteen years ago, the name of Sir Robert Peel was associated in the public mind with much that was affirmed to constitute a standing obstruction to the progress of society. Ten years after, there was no man in the country more popular than Sir Robert Peel. Whatever respect might have been felt for his later rival in the possession of office by those who give that noble

lord credit for the best intentions, still the eyes of all classes of the community were turned to Sir Robert Peel, as the man who alone possessed the nerve, the prudence, the courage, the knowledge, to rescue us from then impending evils, and then existing difficulties—to repair the past, and consolidate the future. This national faith and confidence continued, nay, it increased in intensity, after his retirement from office; yet, ostensibly, what public leader could have been more powerless in the autumn of 1846? He was displaced from his proper seat as leader of the opposition, which then was seized by one who had latterly been his rancorous enemy. He had no personal following in the House, or, at least, so few individual supporters, as scarcely to deserve the name of a following. The chief members of his late government were all equally, to appearance, under a ban. His Home Secretary was driven to skulk in a corner on the back benches: all the other chiefs of his administration were scattered here and there without cohesion. In the House of Lords matters were superficially still worse for him. There, not even a semblance of old party ties was kept up; but the members of his government were driven from what would have been their natural places, which were ostentatiously filled by the protectionist, or country party.

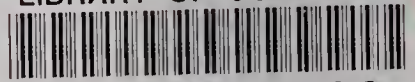
Still, Sir Robert Peel continued the centre of political attraction—the nucleus of future organization. How was it that he held that proud position? How was it that the nation looked on him as their great trustee? How was it that he was morally and personally so powerful, while as a party man so powerless? The answer is one which, for many a weary period, could not have been made in this country—free though our institutions

are. It is because Sir Robert Peel had the moral courage boldly to fling aside the trammels of party, and to rule for the benefit of the whole nation—not for that of the privileged few—that he became in so brief a period the most popular minister England ever had, and that his memory is so universally revered. It is because he then had no party that he could have formed the greatest party that could be organized in a free country—a party of which the constituent elements would have been the same as those which form the nation. He stood, during the three years prior to his untimely decease, in a position of proud isolation. He had offended party. He had dared to conquer party by the power of party. Therefore in the House of Commons he was not, strictly speaking, then so popular as he had been, although those who had been habituated to his sway, and the winning force of his persuasive eloquence, could not but bow to his commanding talents and sagacity. But with the nation it was otherwise. A sense of his services and sacrifices had sunk deeply. In his origin identified with the new sources of British prosperity, he had grown with the growth of the people. His name was associated of late years with all the great triumphs of public opinion. As a commercial and financial minister, he inspired an unprecedented confidence. He had asserted the honesty of the British people. Despising imputations of sordid motives, he had dared to compel the country to return to the sound and safe ways. He was recognised as thoroughly English—English in the impartiality and uprightness of his character, in his intense practicalness, his stern application of common-sense tests, his rejection of the merely theoretical and romantic. If his way was tortuous, his goal was worthy. As a

publicist, he excelled all contemporaries in the knowledge of facts and principles, in the habit of testing alternately the past by the present, and the present by the past; as a statesman, combining grandeur of plan with firmness and steadiness of execution; as a party-leader, inspiring confidence in his guidance, and in the very conduct which precluded faith in his opinions; as a minister, developing the administrative faculty in a degree extraordinary even in an age of administrators; as an orator, if not brilliant or eloquent in the formal sense of the schools, yet always securing the end of all oratory—power over his audience; and, as a ruler of men, governing as free men can only be governed, through the pervading influence of general sentiments, in which individual prejudices and interests were absorbed. He was the agent during a period of transition, making those changes natural and easy which, but for him, or such as him, would have been forced and violent. By self-sacrifice and the inspiration of his example, he averted civil contention:—precluded revolution, by precipitating reform. His was a great part in the world's history; but one which could only be played once. It implied many an agonizing struggle in the doubt whether time and events would shift from his character the responsibilities imposed by contemporary indignation. But, for all these inevitable pangs, Sir Robert Peel had the reward while he lived of a satisfied conscience, and at his death, the universal approval of his contemporaries, anticipating with confidence the verdict of posterity.

THE END.

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